The New Criterion

September 1992

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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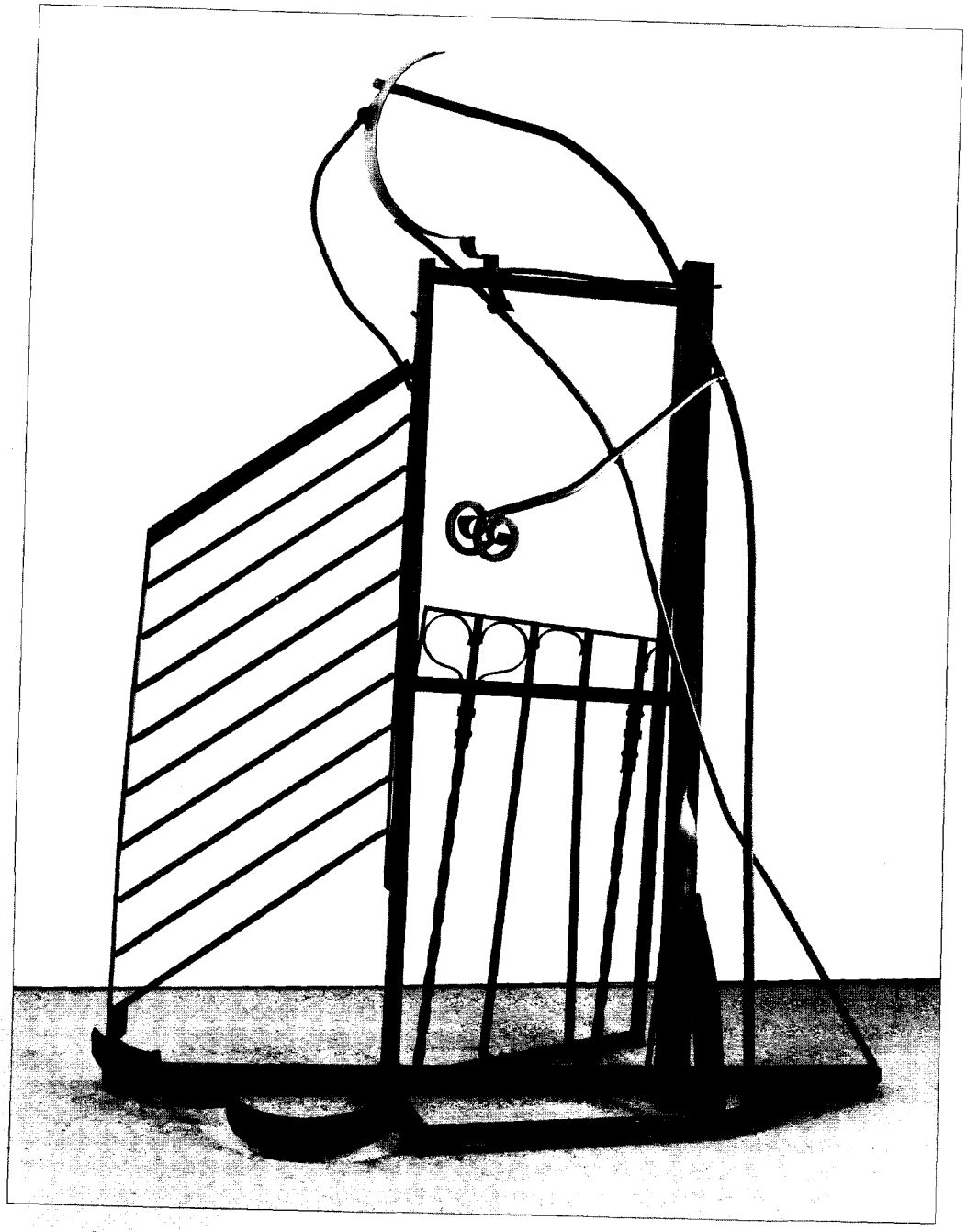

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Notes & Comments: September 1992

Post-Soviet denials

Almost as interesting as the rumors and revelations that have come with the breakup of the Soviet Union and the piecemeal opening of the KGB files in Moscow have been the denials that have promptly followed in their wake. Thus, no sooner was the accusation made that the late I. F. Stone, one of the most celebrated left-wing journalists of our time, had been for many years a paid agent of the KGB than an editorial in *The Nation* vociferously denied that Stone was any such thing. A Marxist? Yes, indeed. But a Soviet agent? The thought was too horrible to contemplate, and so the denial was categorical.

We frankly do not know whether the charge against Stone is true or false, for no hard evidence has been produced by either side in the debate. We seriously doubt that the author of *The Nation*'s editorial knows, either. Oddly enough, both sides of this discussion appear willing to rely upon the same dubious source—a former KGB officer with vast experience in the disinformation business and, from all reports, given to making conflicting statements. This is not the way to make use of the KGB archives for proper historical research—a daunting task even for the most scrupulous scholars.

What is remarkable, however, is the nature of *The Nation*'s denial, which boldly asserts that "to the right wing and its corporate allies [in America], the Soviet Union was never more than a stand-in for the real enemy: home-grown radicalism." Think of what this statement means. The entire Cold War—all those Pentagon and CIA budgets, the wars in Korea and Vietnam, the Berlin Wall, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, etc.—were a hoax devised by "the right wing and its corporate allies" in order to defeat . . . well, people like I. F. Stone and the author of the editorial defending his honor. Poor Stalin! Scarcely forty years dead, and already downgraded to the status of a "front" for Izzy Stone and his pals in the radical media.

Even by the fanciful standards of left-wing historical revisionism, this is a bold move. Yet it represents the kind of claim that we can probably expect to see repeated in one or another form as the Soviet archives come under increasing scrutiny and some real revelations are made. So, too, may we expect to hear again the further claim made in *The Nation*'s editorial—that we are witnessing "a new generation of witch hunters gathering kindling." Since there never was a Soviet threat—according to this historical scenario—there can't be any revelations. Hence the cry of new "witch hunts" in the making.

Notwithstanding revisionist fantasies of this sort, it is important to recall the exact

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nature of a journalistic career like I. F. Stone's. Whatever the KGB files may or may not eventually reveal about his sources of support, the fact is that Stone was for decades a staunch champion of the Soviet line both in the Stalin era and long after. Given his clearly discernible loyalties, we think it would have been a waste of Soviet hard currency for the Kremlin to have paid for something they had every reason to believe would be coming to them with no charge. (But then, of course, the Kremlin was never very good at economics.) And Stone was hardly alone in his profession in promoting the interests of the Soviet Union. He was one of many—one of a great many. So numerous were the Western journalists who performed this valuable service for the Soviet Union for so long a time—indeed, from the very onset of the 1917 Revolution—that it would probably have been impossible as well as unnecessary for the Kremlin to have had them *all* in its pay.

Since we know that the legendary journalist John Reed, the very embodiment of what *The Nation* calls "home-grown radicalism," was in the pay of Lenin's fledgling Communist apparatus to the tune of a million rubles, it would not really be shocking to learn that Stone—and a good many others, too—were also the beneficiaries of Soviet largesse. What was good enough for the author of *Ten Days That Shook the World* might well have been good enough for the author of *The Hidden History of the Korean War*. After all, both books were written to serve the same cause. But the truth is: we don't know. Yet.

What is still so hard for liberals to understand or acknowledge about the Stalinist mind as it operated for so many years in the West is precisely the ease and eagerness with which it lied about the most essential facts about the history of our time. It did so, moreover, with a fierce sense of virtue. Take the case of the premier Stalinist liar, the late Lillian Hellman. Remember Lillian Hellman? Somehow we don't hear much about her anymore. Now that she is gone and can no longer threaten them with retribution, all her liberal champions have fallen silent. No doubt the mounting revelations about her shameless lying have been too much for them. Owing, perhaps, to the wearying surfeit of such revelations in the 1980s, we ourselves missed one of the most piquant. It seems that in 1988, in a little-noticed book called *Lillian Hellman: Her Legend and Legacy* by Carl Rollyson, it was reported that, contrary to Hellman's claim in *Scoundrel Time* that she had never been a member of the Communist Party, she actually had been a Party member from 1938 to 1940—smack in the period of the Hitler-Stalin Pact.

Mr. Rollyson found the evidence in the papers of the late Joseph Rauh, Hellman's lawyer, now on deposit at the Library of Congress. The story is told again in Carol Brightman's forthcoming biography of Mary McCarthy, which is where we caught up with it. Hellman lied to her liberal friends, she lied to the House Un-American Activities Committee, she lied to the readers of *Scoundrel Time* and made a fortune doing it. More shameful than her own lies, however, were the voices of the many literary luminaries that rose in her defense even while she continued to lie about practically everything. It turned out that Mary McCarthy's famous statement on "The Dick Cavett Show"—that "*every word she writes is a lie*, including 'and' and 'the'"—was, oddly for McCarthy, an understatement.

Like Lillian Hellman, I. F. Stone was also an icon of the Left. When he died in 1989, an editorial in *The Nation* declared: "We won't see his like again." How we wish that, for once, *The Nation* had been right! But in this matter, too, *The Nation* was—as usual—wrong. For the press was already full of imitation Stones while the eulogies rolled in, and they have continued to multiply. True,

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they now lack a Soviet Union as their guiding light, but they have been quick to find other causes to serve.

We await the study of the KGB archives with great interest, but for some of us, anyway, the revelations to come, whatever they are, will only add documentation to a pattern of history we have long been familiar with.

"Illiberal Education"

RENE WELLEK WRITES: Having only recently completed the eighth and final volume of *A History of Modern Criticism*, I was late catching up with Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education*. Readers of Roger Kimball's article on Mr. D'Souza's book ("Moral Homicide: Illiberal Education in America," April 1991) may be interested in the following remarks.

I began Mr. D'Souza's book with some general sympathy, but became dismayed when I reached the discussion of literary criticism. On page 177, for example, my "influential book *A Theory of Literature*" is supposed to say that "the definition of literature was problematic and posited circumstances under which Shakespeare might be displaced by the Manhattan phone book or by graffiti." Mr. D'Souza has a footnote that refers to the third edition of that book, which is not called *A Theory* . . . but *Theory of Literature*, and which could never possibly even hint at the absurdity of upholding a definition of literature that "posited circumstances under which Shakespeare might be displaced by the Manhattan phone book or by graffiti." It could never have occurred to me to make such an absurd and tasteless statement, and I challenge Mr. D'Souza to find a single passage in my many writings that even remotely suggests such a thing. While Mr. D'Souza allows that I have "lately expressed alarm over this increasing critical arbitrariness," he nonetheless describes me as one of the founders of "the *au courant* scholarship," a practice that embraces Todorov's psychoanalytic criticism, Marxist criticism, and deconstruction "inspired by Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man." I have never defended deconstruction, and have even repudiated it and other manifestations of "*au courant* criticism" in these pages long before the recent discovery of de Man's early journalism ("Destroying Literary Studies," December 1983). Nor, it must be said, can my work be classed with such Yale deconstructionists as Geoffrey Hartman.

I must protest against a description of literary criticism that makes me the initiator of everything I detest and have combatted for many years in print. My position is turned completely upside down—a fact that can be ascertained by anybody who knows my prolific writings on this question.

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The new Guggenheim "galaxy": 1

Dispersing a museum collection

by Hilton Kramer

Upon entering the reopened Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum this summer, visitors straightaway discovered that the refurbished Frank Lloyd Wright building had once again been stripped of the classics from the permanent collection. Their place had been pre-empted by a "site-specific" installation of fluorescent light tubes by Dan Flavin that occupied all the available space in the main rotunda. The famous problem posed by the Wright structure since its inauguration in 1959—the problem of felicitously accommodating works of art in an architectural setting profoundly hostile to them—was again "solved" by excluding them altogether. The collection was relegated to the new Guggenheim annexes—one uptown, one downtown—that are in some respects no less hostile to the paintings and sculptures than the original Wright building. What had been envisioned during the tenure of Thomas Messner, the previous director, as an on-site expansion that would afford the collection significantly greater public exposure has been turned by Thomas Krens, the current director, into a program for scattering the collection to a variety of venues near and far. The new Guggenheim is to be what Mr. Krens has dubbed a "galaxy" of museums, here and abroad, to which the collection will be dispersed for the purpose of generating the revenues needed to finance aquisitions like the light show—"One of the great pieces . . . a historic work," in the opinion of the director—that reopened the Wright rotunda.

The last time the public had been vouchsafed an opportunity to see the inside of the old Guggenheim, in the spring of 1990, the museum had been similarly emptied of its objects. A giant display of Jenny Holzer's wordy light boxes had filled the entire interior space. This time the wordless, multicolored fluorescent lights of Dan Flavin had supplanted the inane illuminated "sayings" of Jenny Holzer, but the museological message was pretty much the same. The public was again put on notice that in the new Guggenheim of Thomas Krens the historic core of the permanent collection—the Kandinskys, the Brancusis, etc.—would not be considered the museum's main attraction. The limelight, as I suppose it should be called, is now apparently to be reserved, whenever possible, for designers, installation specialists, and other purveyors of spectacle and display. Sometimes called Conceptual artists, these new museum stars can be counted upon to work on a scale more or less consonant with the grandiose ambitions of the director himself. The collection, in other words, is now downgraded to the status of support system—a circulating "asset" to be exploited and deployed and, when convenient, depleted through deaccessioning. No longer considered a cultural treasure in its own right, it is to be put at the disposal of the accelerating requirements of the new "galaxy" and the director's acquisitory appetite.

There can be no doubt that Mr. Krens's idea of turning the collection into a road

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show that can be booked, at a profit, into a network of satellite exhibition spaces will be immensely appealing to the new class of museum officials who are themselves neither scholars nor connoisseurs of the collections in their care. These new museum bureaucrats have little feeling for the objects their institutions have collected in the past and tend in any case to be more interested in fashion than in permanence. What counts for them, above all else, are their own scenarios for future acquisition and expansion. The past is an exploitable and expendable resource like any other. It must be made to serve the purposes of future development. And if this entails the breakup of collections that have shaped their museums' history and given the museums their essential character, not to mention the role that these collections have played in the artistic and cultural life of their communities, that is considered a small enough price to pay for the imagined advantages to be realized.

Just how imaginary these advantages may sometimes turn out to be was demonstrated to us early on in Mr. Krens's tenure as director of the Guggenheim. He had come to New York from the Williams College Museum of Art, in Williamstown, Massachusetts, where, among his other activities, he was much involved in a project for a Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MassMOCA) in the nearby town of North Adams. This gargantuan facility was to be established in a group of abandoned nineteenth-century mills, which would have had to be rehabilitated at immense cost. It was claimed at the time that by transforming these gigantic factory buildings into a world-class center of contemporary art—a cross between Beaubourg and Documenta replete with shops, restaurants, hotels, and other tourist facilities—the woebegone town of North Adams would enjoy a great economic revival and bucolic Massachusetts would become the envy of the international art world.

MassMOCA turned out to be a pipe-dream on a big scale. It enjoyed the support of the then governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis, who persuaded the state legislature to consider a bond issue amounting, as I recall, to some thirty-five million dollars to help underwrite the project. Massachusetts, as you may remember, was then involved in a pipe-dream of its own—the so-called "Massachusetts Miracle," which was quickly revealed to be another name for economic bankruptcy. Still another ardent supporter of the MassMOCA project, incidentally, was David Ross, then the director of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and now the hapless director of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

The MassMOCA fantasy promptly collapsed, of course, but not before Mr. Krens had secured the directorship of the Guggenheim Museum and induced a great many people to believe that the projected facility in North Adams would be an ideal adjunct to the Guggenheim itself. It was on this basis—or so we were led to believe at the time—that Mr. Krens hastily deaccessioned three well-known paintings by Kandinsky, Chagall, and Modigliani for quick cash in order to acquire a costly collection of 1960s Minimalist art from Count Giuseppe Pansa di Biumo. Since, owing to the space it called for, there was no possible way for the Guggenheim to exhibit this collection at the museum itself, even with the addition of the new "tower" that had been commissioned during Mr. Messner's tenure, the idea was advanced that MassMOCA would serve as as appropriate site for the these overscale Minimalist works. It was even claimed that such a mega-installation of Donald Judd boxes, Dan Flavin light tubes, and kindred Minimalist delights would be a great attraction for the folks who journey every summer to the Berkshires to hear the works of Beethoven, Brahms, and other staples of the classical-music repertory performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood. This was another fantasy, if not an example of cynical hype, which, among much else, evinced a remarkable ignorance of the vast differences in taste and culture that separate the classical-music audience from

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the kind of public that is drawn to the esoteric austerities of Minimalist art.

Nothing has come of the MassMOCA project, as all the world knows, but the Kandinsky, the Chagall, and the Modigliani are gone, and the Guggenheim is the proud possessor of an overpriced Minimalist collection that it is now seeking to lease out—or should one say mortgage?—along with other parts of the museum collection to proposed components of its galaxy of exhibition spaces in Spain, Austria, and wherever else Mr. Krens may find likely takers. Meanwhile, having decided to empty the Wright rotunda for the Dan Flavin light show—a new addition, by the way, to the Guggenheim's already elephantine Minimalist collection—Mr. Krens has dispatched samples of his other Minimalist treasures to a new facility in Manhattan's SoHo district.

This new SoHo branch of the Guggenheim, with its huge, featureless, loft-like spaces, is clearly designed to accommodate the overscale Minimalist art in which Mr. Krens has made such a heavy, reckless investment. And the arid, impersonal ambiance of the space is, to be sure, a perfect architectural corollary to the Minimalist works chosen to inaugurate it—numbingly repetitious white paintings by Robert Ryman that adorn the stark white walls with sterile white-on-white variations, and the flat metal "carpets" of Carl Andre that occupy the floor as well as the walls with their similarly narrow geometrical repetitions. Yet Mr. Krens seems not to have noticed that this space is even more inhospitable to the earlier works in the collection—in this instance, the cream of the Guggenheim's collection of Kandinsky paintings and Brancusi sculptures—than the Wright rotunda ever was. By heedlessly dumping these paintings and sculptures into an environment so alien to their character, Mr. Krens has again demonstrated his basic insensibility to any work of art requiring an eye for aesthetic quality.

The same note of insensibility is struck again and again in the way selections from the museum's collection are installed in the new uptown "tower" galleries. These new galleries, with their odd proportions and dead space resulting in incommodious, misshapen exhibition areas, would have been a challenge to a better eye than Mr. Krens possesses. But as he has no feeling for the collection that has passed into his care, the inaugural installation in this ill-conceived facility is little more than a badly lighted jumble. The only exception is the fourth-floor gallery where the small-scale work of the early abstractionists—Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Vantongerloo, et al.—has been given room to breathe, a felicity denied to almost everything else in this tower installation. This gallery is also the only reminder—at least for those of us with some memory of the Guggenheim's history—of the museum's origin as a Museum of Non-Objective Painting. As for the loans from private collections that Mr. Krens has also crammed into the crowded tower galleries, these signify nothing more than a desire by Mr. Krens to replicate for the future Guggenheim "galaxy" the same roster of high-investment names —Rauschenberg, Warhol, Lichtenstein, et al.—already regularly and ludicrously overexposed at the Whitney, the Museum of Modern Art, and other venues of art-world fashion and commerce.

This handling—or rather, mishandling—of the permanent collection on the occasion of the museum's reopening to the public is itself another sign of the degree to which the marketing mentality has supplanted connoisseurship—which is to say, an expert knowledge and understanding of art—in the museum profession. It is this fateful development in our cultural life that Mr. Krens's directorship of the Guggenheim represents so vividly—and so catastrophically. He did not initiate this radical change in the way our museums now conduct their affairs. Bureaucratic types like Thomas Krens never initiate anything. What they are good at is identifying a social trend—in this case, a readiness to market the museum "product" without regard for aesthetic costs or cultural consequences—and devising scenarios for its further acceleration and exploitation.

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If we had to identify the author of this woeful development, the obvious candidate would be Thomas Hoving. During his ten-year tenure as director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1968-1978), Mr. Hoving provided a model for aspiring "activist" museum professionals of Mr. Krens's generation. The mania for spendthrift expansion and extravagant acquisition; the uninhibited commercialization of the museum's resources accompanied by the unconscionable deaccessioning of museum-class art objects from the museum's collection; above all, the radical shift to ballyhoo and hype in hawking the museum's appeal to the public while at the same time lowering the level of public discourse about art itself—in these and in so many other practices that characterized the Hoving era at the Met, we were indeed given a dramatic introduction to a wholesale change in the ethos of the art museum as a cultural institution. Mr. Hoving is now mercifully absent from the museum scene, but the Hoving museum ethos has nonetheless triumphed. Mr. Krens's program for a "galaxy" of Guggenheims here and abroad is only a further, excruciating extension of it.

With the creation of this museological "galaxy" upon us, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum as we have known it in the past may now be declared officially dead. In its place is a very different kind of cultural institution—an art museum in which serious artistic interests will be shifted to an ancillary role and the museum collection itself looked upon as an expendable resource. In this respect, Mr. Krens's decision to empty the Frank Lloyd Wright rotunda of the museum's collection for the reopening of the Guggenheim while exiling its Kandinskys and Brancusis to a temporary booking in SoHo must surely be taken as a preview of things to come.

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The new Guggenheim "galaxy": II

Disfiguring a landmark

by Mildred F. Schmertz

Architectural expansion can make for some very odd couples. A case in point is the union of Frank Lloyd Wright's recently renovated Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum with the museum's new annex, designed by the New York firm of Gwathmey Siegel & Associates. The two buildings represent opposite poles of architectural ambition. Wright, the master form-giver, had invented a magnificent space charged with spirit and wonder. Then, with his seemingly effortless charm, he beguiled his well-meaning but comparatively innocent patrons, the Guggenheims, into paying for its construction. That is the way it used to be, at least for acknowledged genius, in the world of architectural high culture. In 1982, twenty-three years after the completion of Wright's building, Charles Gwathmey and Robert Siegel were engaged by the Guggenheim trustees to expand the facility and to do something about Wright's mistakes and omissions. Even had they been capable of providing it, no masterpiece was called for. Their charge was to program and design an annex that no one but their clients wanted and to get it built in the face of an exceedingly and rightfully hostile public, led by determined preservationists, historians, and fans of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Wright's museum had its beginning in the architect's vision of infinite space: spiraling, centrally focused, and grand. It was a long-cherished dream that he hoped some rich patron would eventually enable him to build. It mattered little to him what sets of functions his cosmological helix would serve —cultural, religious, or civic—nor did he much care how or where it was to be sited. What mattered was that he be allowed to build at least one such structure in his lifetime. Wright almost realized this dream as early as 1924 with his design for the Gordon Strong Planetarium project, a dome-crowned space encircled by a spiral automobile ramp meant to occupy the pinnacle of Sugar Loaf Mountain, Maryland. The planetarium was never built. And the Guggenheim Museum, as idiosyncratic as the rest of Wright's great works, would have remained on paper, too, had it not been for his patrons. Infatuated yet inspired, they accepted and allowed Wright to build a design that ignored and circumvented fundamental, practical requirements of their project.

The architect envisioned a building that was more monument than museum, revealing little regard for the non-objective art that Solomon Guggenheim, guided by the collection's first director, Hilla Rebay, had been assembling. For Wright, architecture was the "mother art"; painting, sculpture, furniture, and the decorative crafts were merely her ornament. He must have hoped that, in some not-too-distant future, a more enlightened curatorial generation would throw out the collection of modern art Rebay had assembled and replace it with *true* art, art made for his space. It is clear that Wright regretted that he would not be

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around to create it himself. Not surprisingly, he did not share these subversive thoughts with the Guggenheims. In a brochure put out by the museum in 1960, less than a year after the museum opened and the architect's death, Wright was quoted as follows:

> The building was intended by Solomon R. Guggenheim to make a suitable place for the exhibition of an advanced form of painting wherein line, color and form are a language in themselves . . . independent of reproduction of objects animate or inanimate, thus placing painting in a realm hitherto enjoyed by music alone. This advanced painting has seldom been presented in other than the incongruous rooms of old static architecture. Here in the harmonious fluid quiet created by this building interior the new painting will be seen by itself under favorable conditions.

Favorable conditions? In fact, the Guggenheim's large rotunda as Wright designed it failed extravagantly to serve the early collection. To this day it continues to be a difficult and challenging space for exhibiting art, particularly for the large-scale paintings and sculpture that the museum later acquired. Even though it widens as it rises, the spiral ramp along which viewers must pass is too narrow, except near its summit, to allow one to back away much from the art, while the curved, tilted, segmented walls, combined with low ceilings, make its installation a curatorial nightmare. The unfiltered natural light that Wright introduced in narrow bands of skylights at the intersections of ramp-wall and ceiling washed the sloping surface behind the paintings, creating a glaring halo around them. From the beginning, furthermore, the museum had inadequate technical, administrative, archival, storage, and library facilities. Wright must have believed that the volumetric space these required would crowd the building's cramped site, compromising his conception of an infinite spiral, marring the fulfillment of ideas rooted in a lifetime of work.

The Guggenheim's great play of inward-looking, overhanging, circular galleries radiating from a center is Wright's apotheosis of themes that extend as far back in his career as the Larkin Building in Buffalo, New York (1904), the Unity Church in Oak Park, Illinois (1906), and some of the early prairie houses. Although they are not circular, these buildings focus upon a central community space, defined by tray-like rectangular mezzanines. Circular elements appeared early in Wright's murals, sculptural ornament, furniture, patterned windows, and lighting fixtures, but not until the Thirties with any frequency in his buildings. Tree-like columns with circular capitals hold up the main skylight of the Johnson Wax building in Racine, Wisconsin (1939). The Morris Gift Shop in San Francisco (1949) and several houses from the late Forties and early Fifties, as well as a few unbuilt projects from that period, glory in an abundance of circles and spirals.

Construction of the Guggenheim Museum was not only the fulfillment of a longstanding dream by America's greatest architect. It was also the masterly culmination of his lifetime of experiment and experience, a work of major aesthetic and historic importance. As such it has obliged those in its charge to preserve it intact. Unfortunately neither Thomas M. Messer, the museum's director from 1961 until 1988, nor his successor, Thomas Krens, has acknowledged this obligation. As a result of their efforts, the interior of Wright's masterpiece has been flawlessly restored, but the building itself has been flanked by a ten-story annex. Thanks to the skill that Gwathmey Siegel brought to the project, the addition has turned out to be the most quiet and discreet of background buildings. Nevertheless, it should not, and need not, have been built.

Charles Gwathmey and Robert Siegel presented their original scheme for the annex to the public in early June 1985 by means of an article in *The New York Times*. As originally designed, it horrified admirers of Wright's museum. Once the heavy, overbearing, and aggressively modeled tower had been caricatured as a tank that made Wright's large

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rotunda look like a toilet bowl, it became clear to Thomas Messer and his architects that public outrage alone could defeat their plans. The architects were simply responding to Messer's ambitious mandate to double the exhibition space for the permanent collection, to make the small rotunda public and accessible for the first time, to enlarge on-site storage facilities and technical areas, to create more administrative offices, relocate the library and archives within the museum's premises, and expand the capacity and services of the restaurant and bookstore.

Community opposition, however, forced the Guggenheim to scale back its program and produce a less obtrusive annex. It was urgent, furthermore, that the architects revise their design expeditiously. In October 1989 the Guggenheim would reach its thirtieth birthday, the age at which New York City buildings become eligible for landmark status. It was certain that New York City's Landmarks Commission would so honor the museum, thereby subjecting any addition or interior remodeling not substantially underway to a review process that could postpone construction indefinitely. Since the significant birthday was dangerously close, the Guggenheim's architects moved quickly to develop a design acceptable to other city agencies so that they could get construction started. They succeeded, and landmarking, granted in 1990, came too late. Guggenheim hype now boasts, truly but disingenuously, that the museum is New York City's youngest landmark.

The Guggenheim also dissembles in its claim that Wright really wanted an annex all along. When it became obvious that the most acceptable approach that Gwathmey Siegel could take would be to transform their too large and excessively sculptured tower into a simpler and smaller slab, some 1949 drawings by Wright were resurrected to indicate that the master would have done just that. Planned to house galleries, archives, and studios to be rented to artists for income, Wright's proposal was fifteen stories high, twenty-five feet wide, and one hundred feet deep. Never fully developed, it was soon abandoned. Gwathmey Siegel's second scheme, constructed on the foundations of a mid-Sixties four-story annex designed by William Wesley Peters of the Taliesin Foundation, bears little resemblance to Wright's concrete-and-glass invention, except for the Indiana limestone pattern inspired by Wright's fenestration module. In the hope of disarming the opposition, however, the existence of Wright's concept is used by the Guggenheim as evidence that the master considered a tower to be an appropriate backdrop for his museum, and that the new slab conforms to his wishes.

As built it couldn't. A rectilinear foil for Wright's spiral, the annex, though decent and quiet, could never be decent and quiet enough. Rammed into the narrow remainder of the Guggenheim site, it crowds Wright's structure. As viewed from the north, the slab itself is well differentiated from the museum's small rotunda wing by means of an intersecting glass curtain wall. The westward facing limestone wall, however, collides with the uppermost spin of the large rotunda at an angle that subverts its radial geometry. This unavoidable juncture, defiling Wright's building, looks worst when one looks south from the opposite side of Fifth Avenue. Some have pointed out that Gwathmey Siegel could have devised some sort of vertical notch to reveal that Wright concluded that segment of his spiral against the radially appropriate diagonal wall of a triangular stair.

The architects insist, however, that such an interruption, in addition to reducing gallery space within the tower, would have been impossible to accomplish successfully because of a pre-existing freight elevator, fire stair, and the penthouse on the roof of the rotunda. "The people who ask, Why no notch? just don't understand the building," asserts Thomas Sansone, the designer who represented the Guggenheim in its dealings with the architects.

If the expansion itself was misguided, it must be admitted that, once one is inside the renovated Guggenheim, there is much

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to celebrate. Ever since the museum first opened, it had been abused by practical but clumsy measures to improve its functionality. Within the large rotunda, for example, the top segment of the spiral ramp was closed off for storage and painting restoration. Soon after the building opened, then-director James Johnson Sweeney, a believer in artificial light for artwork, sealed the dome over the rotunda as well as the top ring of skylights. Gwathmey Siegel installed new ultraviolet filtering glass in the dome and skylights and opened the spiral all the way up. Restored and painted stark white, instead of the beige putty Wright specified, the rotunda is now more austere than Wright had intended. Indeed, his renderings depict a building richer in color, texture, and materials than the original budget allowed, reminding one that the Parthenon as well was once polychromed.

Wright designed the smaller rotunda wing (named the Monitor because of its resemblance to the Civil War vessel) to consist of three circular mezzanines of office space overlooking an atrium penetrated by a fish-shaped enclosure containing toilets and stairs. But this provision soon proved inadequate to meet the ever increasing need for curatorial and administrative space. Gwathmey Siegel remodeled the first floor of this elegant, playful interior into a rather tight gift shop adjacent to a small bookstore. On the mezzanines are exhibited the Thannhauser collection of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and early modern paintings and sculpture, works of small dimension at home within the intimate spaces of this little wing, now renamed in honor of the Thannhausers, major benefactors of the museum.

It would not have been possible to devote the small rotunda entirely to galleries and a shop, or to provide so much exhibition space in the annex, were it not for the Guggenheim's new off-site expansion program. This program includes gallery, office, and storage space in the Guggenheim Museum SoHo, a landmark loft renovated by Arata Isozaki that allows for the exhibition of huge works, and a new storage facility on New York City's West Side. The preservationists, of course, had been urging off-site expansion for decades as the way to save Wright's masterpiece from an annex. Had such a policy been implemented earlier, the Guggenheim might have been spared the controversial addition. That would have been the way to honor Wright.

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Logic, love & unbearable pity: the private Bertrand Russell

by Roger Kimball

When Mr. Apollinax visited the United States
His laughter tinkled among the teacups.
I thought of Fragilion, that shy figure
among the birch-trees,
And of Priapus in the shubbery
Gaping at the lady in the swing.
—T. S. Eliot, from "Mr. Apollinax"

Thee will find out in time that I have a great love of professing vile sentiments, I don't know why, unless it springs from long efforts to avoid priggery.
—Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, 1894

It must have been extraordinary, being Bertrand Russell. Born in an isolated spot near Trelleck, Wales, in 1872 when Victoria still had twenty-nine years to reign, he lived on in robust health until 1970. He lived, in other words, from the zenith of the British Empire through its gradual dismemberment and dissolution. A young adult when the Boer War broke out in 1899, he was a vigorous nonagenarian when the Vietnam War was being prosecuted in earnest. In his lifetime he saw the extension of the franchise to women, two world wars, the appearance of electric lights, telephones, movies, the automobile, the airplane, computers, and manned space travel, not to mention antibiotics and open-heart surgery. His first wife knew and corresponded with Walt Whitman; his fourth and last, whom he married when he was seventy-nine, helped him campaign for nuclear disarmament.

Of course, unusual longevity was hardly the only conspicuous thing about Bertrand Arthur William Russell; there was also his illustrious Whig family, his prodigious intellectual gifts and achievements, and his inveterate campaigning for all manner of progressive causes, from female suffrage, pacifism, and birth control to world government and humanistic atheism.

Political activism was practically part of the Russell birthright. A seventeenth-century ancestor, Lord William Russell, was executed in 1683 for his part in the Rye-House Plot, an attempt to assassinate Charles II and his brother, the future James II. Bertrand's grandfather, whom Victoria made an earl in 1861, introduced the first Reform Bill in 1832 and was twice elected Prime Minister. His father, John, Viscount Amberley, was Lord Russell's eldest son. Two children survived to maturity: Frank, who was born in 1865, and Bertrand, their third and last child. John Stuart Mill, a close friend of the family, agreed to be Bertrand's secular "godfather" (though his death in 1873 relieved him from the duty of discharging that obligation).

Amberley was less successful but no less liberal than his father in politics, and he and his wife, Kate, made themselves notorious as freethinkers in religious and moral matters.[1] There was, for example, the question of

1 In 1937, Russell published *The Amberley Papers*, a collection of his parents' letters and diaries, which he edited with his third wife, Patricia.

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Kate's relationship with one of young Frank's tutors, Douglas Spalding, who by the 1870s was in an advanced stage of consumption. As Bertrand recalled in the first volume of his *Autobiography* (1967), "my father and mother decided that although [Spalding] ought to remain childless on account of his tuberculosis, it was unfair to expect him to remain celibate. My mother therefore allowed him to live with her, though I know of no evidence that she derived any pleasure from doing so."

Amberley and Kate fully intended to impart their emancipated views to their children. But Bertrand's emergence as a full-fledged freethinker was to be postponed by his parents' untimely deaths. Kate (along with her young daughter, Rachel) died in 1874 from consumption; Amberley, devastated by the loss, followed two years later from a combination of bronchitis and (it was said) inconsolable grief. He had directed that his children be brought up by Spalding and Bertrand's second "godfather," Thomas Cobden-Sanderson, another of Kate's admirers and a confirmed atheist. But revelation of Spalding's relationship with Kate led Lord and Lady Russell to contest these provisions. The result was that Frank continued his schooling at Winchester while Bertrand was promptly packed off to his grandparents' house in London, a grace-and-favour residence called Pembroke Lodge in Richmond Park.

Less than three years later, in 1878, Lord Russell died, aged eighty-six. He left young Bertrand in the care of his wife, who was twenty-three years his junior. Of Scotch Presbyterian stock, Lady Russell was a woman of high Whiggish principles. She hoped that her favorite grandson would one day take his place as a great liberal politician like his grandfather. Known as "Deadly Nightshade" by some of her husband's colleagues, she also exhibited a severe and unbending moral fervor. Duty ruled her life. She early on gave Bertrand a Bible with her favorite verses copied onto the fly-leaf. Among them was the injunction "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil": it pleased the mature Bertrand Russell to believe that he had always striven to follow this commandment faithfully. Nor did creature comforts hold much appeal for the dowager Countess. "She disliked wine, abhorred tobacco, and was always on the verge of becoming a vegetarian," Russell recalled years later. "Her life was austere. She ate only the plainest food, breakfasted at eight, and until she reached the age of eighty, never sat in a comfortable chair until after tea." Emotional austerity, too, was part of the regimen: "It was obvious," he concluded, "that she never came anywhere near knowing what it feels like to be in love."

Unlike Frank, Bertrand continued to be educated at home by a series of tutors until he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1890. But "Granny" Russell was far and away the predominating influence on his early life: coddling yet stern, solicitous, exacting, indefatigable, ubiquitous. "She demanded that everything be viewed through a mist of Victorian sentiment," he noted. By his early teens, Bertrand had abandoned belief in God—a result, he said, of reading Mill's *Autobiography*. The misty sentiment that his grandmother required became increasingly difficult to abide: "Indeed, after the age of fourteen I found living at home only endurable at the cost of complete silence about everything that interested me."

It is not surprising that Bertrand Russell should later have complained of enduring a lonely and isolated childhood. "In adolescence," he recalled in *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930), "I hated life and was constantly on the verge of suicide, from which, however, I was restrained by the desire to know more mathematics." Lady Russell's unremitting attentions were a prescription for inducing introversion and loneliness. They were also a foolproof prescription for provoking rebellion. And rebellion, though delayed, did come in due course. Yet what is perhaps most remarkable is not the course of Russell's rebellion: that indeed was rather a predictable diet of apocalyptic atheism,

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cranky political activism, and insatiable philandering. More telling is the extent to which he remained faithful to his grandmother's sentimentalizing imperatives. The gospels that he preached were founded on different precepts, to be sure, but the mists of reformist, often utopian, moralism still wafted about in great profusion.

The complex story of Russell's life has already been told in several versions. There are, first of all, the multitude of fragmentary sketches that exist in letters, diaries, memoirs, poems, and novels by his wide and distinguished circle of friends and acquaintances. T. S. Eliot, Beatrice Webb, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, H. G. Wells, George Santayana, A. J. Ayer, among others, as well as several of Russell's lovers and at least one of his wives have made notable contributions to the compendious stock of Russelliana. Then there are Russell's own memoirs and autobiographical writings, culminating in his three-volume retrospective, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* (1967-1969), a patchwork of new and old writing that includes a generous selection of correspondence. There is also *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (1975), Ronald Clark's long and judicious biography, as well as more partisan efforts such as *Bertrand Russell: The Passionate Skeptic* (1957) by the philosopher's friend Alan Wood, and Alan Ryan's recent *Bertrand Russell: A Political Life* (1988). Two new biographies, by Caroline Moorehead and Ray Monk, are reportedly on the way.

Still, although the news about Bertrand Russell has scarcely been under-reported, publication of Nicholas Griffin's first volume of the philosopher's selected letters is a welcome event.[2] For one thing, these letters provide a fuller and more detailed sampling of Russell's character, obsessions, and eccentricities than has hitherto been available. Russell's *Autobiography* resembles Rousseau's *Confessions* in its claim to present a portrait of *un homme dans toute la vérité de la nature*. But—again like the *Confessions*—it is determinedly calculated about exactly what counts as "all the truth of nature." Some warts pass muster and are bravely declared, others are discreetly concealed. Professor Griffin's selection of letters portrays a more hesitant and bedeviled figure than Russell dramatized in his *Autobiography*. Moreover, the abundant commentary and notes with which Professor Griffin accompanies these letters, confidently drawing on a wide range of material from writings by Russell and his correspondents, assures that the volume succeeds in its ambition of furnishing readers with a fresh "epistolary biography" of its subject.

Professor Griffin, who teaches philosophy in Canada at McMaster University, Ontario—home of the gargantuan Russell archives—has assembled 240 letters here. One is reminded how important letters once were, not only as a form of literary expression but also as a fundamental means of communication. In a time before telephones and automobiles (and before the deterioration of postal service), the habit of writing was cultivated by the educated classes as surely as any other social grace. Entire relationships were conducted on paper in a way that would be difficult to credit today. The total number of letters by Russell in the archives, Professor Griffin estimates, is currently between forty and fifty thousand, and is growing steadily as new correspondence is discovered.

With so many letters to choose from, there is inevitably something arbitrary about any selection of a few hundred. Professor Griffin readily concedes that he could have put together several other representative volumes with virtually no duplication. As it is, only one letter included here has been published in full before: a famous dispatch from 1902 to the great German mathematician Gottlob Frege (1848-1925), written just as the second volume of his pathbreaking *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik* (first vol-

2 *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell, Volume 1: The Private Years (1884-1914)*, edited by Nicholas Griffin; Houghton Mifflin, 553 pages, $35.

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ume, 1893) was going to press. Russell's letter politely outlines a fundamental logical paradox in Frege's work, thus delivering a shattering blow to his entire philosophy of mathematics. At that time, Frege was still an obscure figure. Russell's letter confronted him with the unraveling of his life's work, yet he replied with a grace and intellectual integrity that are nothing short of exemplary. Granting Russell's point, Frege poignantly admitted that it had "shaken the basis on which I intended to build arithmetic" and that it "is all the more serious since . . . not only the foundations of my arithmetic, but also the sole possible foundations of arithmetic, seem to vanish." Frege's response, Russell noted some sixty years later, "was almost superhuman, a telling indication of that of which men are capable if their dedication is to creative work and knowledge instead of cruder efforts to dominate and be known."

The letters collected by Professor Griffin in this volume begin with a few childhood missives to relatives and end with a handful of stunned notes written at the beginning of August 1914 just as World War I was breaking out. They show us Russell in his college days at Trinity, his teaching there and membership in the famous *conversazione* society, the Apostles (so called because membership was limited to a dozen). They follow him through his long courtship of his first wife, Alys Pearsall Smith, whom he first met when he was seventeen and married in December 1894. Along the way, we witness Russell's intellectual coming-of-age, his move from the chummy idealism of British Hegelianism to an absorption in the chaster, more rigorous tenets of mathematical logic. The volume concludes with some seventy letters (out of more than one thousand) to the celebrated society hostess Lady Ottoline Morrell (1873-1938), with whom Russell had a tempestuous and exceedingly wordy affair beginning in 1911.

These were the years in which Russell did his most important philosophical work. Of the twelve books that he published between 1896 and 1914 (he published seventy-one altogether), at least three helped to change the tenor of modern analytic philosophy: *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903), *Philosophical Essays* (1910), and the three-volume magnum opus, *Principia Mathematica* (1910-1913), on which Russell collaborated for almost a decade with his former tutor, the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). A projected fourth volume was never completed. These books, concerned as they are with the precise machinery of implication, deduction, class membership, and other basic logical concepts, are formidably technical. Russell's overall ambition, he wrote at the end of *The Principles of Mathematics*, was to demonstrate "that all pure mathematics deals exclusively with concepts definable in terms of a very small number of logical concepts, and that all its propositions are deducible from a very small number of fundamental logical principles." Not surprisingly, the fruit of this effort to reduce mathematics to logic, the *Principia*, is filled with page after page of abstruse logical notation that is inaccessible to all but a few specialists.

It was during this period, however, that Russell made his first efforts as a philosophical popularizer. *The Problems of Philosophy*, a brief introduction to the subject that he referred to in several letters as his "shilling shocker," was published in 1912. Like almost everything that he published for non-specialists, *The Problems of Philosophy* is written with exceptional clarity and verve. Organized by topic ("Appearance and Reality," "How *A Priori* Knowledge Is Possible," "Truth and Falsehood," "The Limits of Philosophical Knowledge," etc.), it is still occasionally used in the classroom. Russell's attempts to win a larger readership for his philosophical writings (and to increase his earnings) culminated in 1945 when he published *A History of Western Philosophy*, a quirky but encyclopedic survey based on lectures that he delivered at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia. Engagingly written, the book became an instant bestseller on

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both sides of the Atlantic, and its success did much to win Russell the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950.

Russell's most famous pupil was undoubtedly the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), who had come to Cambridge to study philosophy with Russell in 1911 after abandoning a career in engineering. While there are no letters from Russell to him in this volume, Wittgenstein does make several cameo appearances. Describing one of his first encounters with "my German," Russell reports that he "came back with me after my lecture and argued till dinner-time—obstinate and perverse, but I think not stupid." Indeed. It was not long before pupil and teacher were arguing as peers. "I think he has *genius*," Russell noted in a later letter. "In discussion with him I put out *all* my force and only just equalled his. With all my other pupils I should squash them flat if I did so." Within a few years, Russell was acting as an amanuensis, scribbling down thoughts that the twenty-four-year-old Wittgenstein, who found writing preternaturally difficult, dictated as he nervously paced back and forth in his tutor's rooms. "W. makes me feel it is worthwhile I should exist," Russell explained, "because no one else could understand him or make the world understand him." By 1914, Wittgenstein's ruthless dissection of inconsistencies in Russell's philosophy had a paralyzing effect. "Wittgenstein persuaded me that what wanted doing in logic was too difficult for me," Russell admitted in the second volume of his *Autobiography*. "So there was no really vital satisfaction of my philosophical impulse in that work, and philosophy lost its hold on me." In essence, Russell found that Wittgenstein had done for him what he had done for Frege a dozen years before.

Professor Griffin's subtitle for this volume, "The Private Years," seems doubly appropriate. While the book contains a handful of letters to G. E. Moore, Gilbert Murray, Whitehead, and sundry other professional colleagues, three-quarters or more are to Alys or to Ottoline Morrell. Of the rest, many are to other women for whom Russell harbored some romantic interest. Philosophical matters are sometimes broached in these letters, but for the most part their focus is adamantly personal. Without Professor Griffin's commentary, readers unfamiliar with the outlines of his biography or thought would often be lost. These were Russell's private years in another sense, as well. He had always dabbled in politics and been susceptible to "causes"; early on, for example, he was a vocal champion of the suffragettes (though he took exception to the violent tactics some of them employed); and already in 1907 he had stood for Parliament (the first of three failed attempts). But it was really only with the advent of World War I that he fully emerged as an important public, as distinct from philosophical, figure. Reserved for a future volume or volumes, therefore, is the spectacle of Lord Russell (he succeeded to the earldom when his brother died in 1931) the moral crusader and self-appointed public conscience: the Russell of the Pugwash Conference, the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, and an International War Crimes Tribunal assembled to charge the United States with atrocities in Vietnam.

In short, what we witness in these letters and snippets from other writings provided by Professor Griffin is the process by which a fiercely shy, slightly morbid aristocrat blossomed into a brilliant, though tortured, enigma. About Russell's brilliance, there can be little question. Whitehead—himself a formidable intellect—concluded that his former pupil had the best analytic mind of any philosopher in history, "including Aristotle." And Leonard Woolf, reflecting on the impression that Russell made in the 1890s, conceded that he had "the quickest mind of anyone I have ever known; like the greatest of chess players he sees in a flash six moves ahead of the ordinary player and one move ahead of all the other Grand Masters. However serious he may be," Woolf continued, "his conversation scintillates with wit and a kind of puckish humour flickers through his thought."

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As Woolf's observation suggests, Russell's brilliance was not confined to technical philosophical matters. He was immensely well read and delighted in the banter of Oxbridge repartée. "I am looking forward very much to getting back to Cambridge," he wrote to Alys in 1893, "and being able to say what I think and not to mean what I say: two things which at home are impossible. Cambridge is one of the few places where one can talk unlimited nonsense and generalities without anyone pulling one up or confronting one with them when one says just the opposite the next day." Given his taste for what Algernon Moncrieff might have called piffle, it is curious how often the words "prig" and "priggish" crop up in connection with Russell. He often accuses himself of priggishness; others, especially those closest to him, not infrequently concur. Sometimes it is in jest, or half in jest. As Russell recalls in his *Autobiography*, in 1891 he became a member in good standing of the Order of Prigs, a fanciful group established by Alys's older brother, Logan Pearsall Smith, the displaced American dandy and aphorist. Among the maxims and rules promulgated by Logan were injunctions to "Deny yourself in inconspicuous ways and don't speak of your economies" and "Abstain entirely from all intoxicating liquors, except for purposes of health."

Less obviously in jest was the priggishness that often surfaced in Russell's relationship with Alys. It was a difficult courtship all around. Five years Russell's senior, Alys was a neurasthenic feminist reformer whose main interests were female suffrage and the temperance movement. (For her sake, Russell became a teetotaler for many years.) She came from a wealthy and unusual American Quaker family living in England. In addition to Logan, there was her sister Mary, the eldest Smith child, who ran off with and eventually married Bernard Berenson, the great art connoisseur and doyen of I Tatti. The Quaker background accounts for the archaic *thee*s, *thou*s, and *thine*s that dot Russell's correspondence with Alys beginning in 1894: touching in its way, perhaps, but finally a bit cloying. Alys deserves recognition as one of the few people in Russell's circle who could compete with him in self-righteousness. Typical was the proposal she made when they were engaged that they turn their house into a kind of hotel for the homeless. She also professed grave anxiety about sex—a more perfect caricature of the repressed Victorian lady would be hard to find—believing it an unpleasant and wholly regrettable requirement of continuing the race. Nervous discussion of the dreaded topic filled their correspondence for a time. A wretched, solicitous Russell did his best to reassure her, writing that "as to frequency, I am sure it ought not to be great."

Among other obstacles that the young couple faced was the adamant opposition of Lady Russell, who regarded Alys as a socially unsuitable parvenu (not to mention that she was an American) with improper designs on her grandson. When simple pleading failed to convince Russell to break off the engagement, she hired a doctor to certify that because of insanity on both sides of the family they should not have children. Russell's first response to this news was to suggest that they have children by other people, a prospect, Professor Griffin reports, that Alys "hotly rejected." They decided at first to marry and not have children, discovering in the end that they couldn't, a contingency that intervened in their disagreement about whether or not to bring up their children as Christians. (The desire for progeny grew on Russell. He later had three children, two with his second wife, Dora Black, one with his third, Patricia Spence.) What turned out to be an even more telling problem was Alys's worry that she was not intelligent enough for Russell. In retrospect, the reassurances he offered during their courtship bear the grim mark of habitual condescension. "Of course one doesn't imagine thee would do any brilliant original thinking," he wrote a month before they were married, "but thee might form part of the indispensable intelligent audience."

Despite this inauspicious litany, Bertie

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and Alys were reasonably happy for four or five years. As late as November 1901 he could rhapsodize that "since last winter I have known that life without thee would not be possible." Nevertheless, this was a period of great emotional tumult for Russell. There was, first of all, the quasi-mystical experience he had after hearing Gilbert Murray read part of his new translation of Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Returning to the Whiteheads' after the reading, he and Alys found Evelyn Whitehead, Alfred's wife, in the midst of a painful angina attack. As Russell recalls in his *Autobiography*,

> Suddenly the ground seemed to give way beneath me, and I found myself in quite another region. Within five minutes I went through some such reflections as the following: the loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of that sort of love that the religious teachers have preached; whatever does not spring from this motive is harmful, or at best useless; it follows that war is wrong, that a public school education is abominable, that the use of force is to be deprecated, and that in human relations one should penetrate to the core of loneliness in each person and speak to that. . . . At the end of those five minutes, I had become a completely different person. For a time, a sort of mystic illumination possessed me. . . . Having been an imperialist, I became . . . pro-Boer and a pacifist.

No doubt this was the shattering, transformative experience that Russell presents it as. But it is also a splendid example of the higher priggishness at work: "It follows that . . . " What? That a public school education is abominable? This is the logic of the proselytizer, not the philosopher.

Some commentators have suggested that such passages indicate a profound religious sensibility lurking beneath Russell's probing empirical armor. In fact, Russell's entire outlook was programmatically anti-religious. In "Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization?" (1930), for example, he begins by noting that he regards religion as "a disease born of fear and as a source of untold misery to the human race." But this sophomoric conviction did not prevent him from exploiting an aestheticized mysticism for his own ends. Within a year of his "mystic illumination," Russell discovered that life without Alys, if not yet possible, was certainly desirable. I believe it was the literary critic Harold Bloom who once remarked that falling out of love is one of the great experiences of life. Be that as it may, something of the sort seems to have happened to Russell in 1902. He puts it thus in his *Autobiography*: "I went out bicycling one afternoon, and suddenly, as I was riding along a country road, I realized that I no longer loved Alys. I had no idea until this moment that my love for her was even lessening." In a canceled passage that Ronald Clark reproduces in his biography, Russell immediately added that "I now believe that it is not in my nature to remain physically fond of any woman for more than seven or eight years. As I view it now, this was the basis of the matter and the rest was humbug."

Humbug or not, he and Alys continued to live together in brittle solitude even after he confessed that his love was dead. Logic, as Professor Griffin observes, became Russell's "opiate." In an extraordinary feat of concentration, he threw himself into work on the *Principia*, struggling over it nine or ten hours a day for almost a decade. Although he claimed to have been celibate for the entire period, there was at least one emotional entanglement. Ronald Clark suggests that "the evidence, though circumstantial, is considerable" that Russell fell in love with Evelyn Whitehead around this time. If true, nothing came of it, and a lingering despondency settled over both Russell and Alys. In one of his most famous essays, "A Free Man's Worship" (1903), the depth of Russell's despondency shows itself in a credo of cosmological pessimism:

> That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears,

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> his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast depth of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

Russell presents all this as the necessary result of dispassionate reflection. It is clear, at any rate, that it is a coefficient of his unshakable bleakness. In 1905, he wrote to one correspondent that "of course if one could wholly kill the desire for happiness, many things would cease to be tiring, and one's power of work would be greatly increased. But though I have laboured hard to produce this result, I have not yet succeeded." Hence his cultivation of frivolity: when everything real is full of pain, he lamented, "there is an increasing temptation to live on the surface." Evelyn Waugh aptly characterized this phase of Russell's blustering nihilism in a 1928 review of *Skeptical Essays*: "he is able without a tremor," Waugh wrote, "to look into the common and unfathomable abysses of pessimism and turn aside with the judicial comment, 'Yes, I think it is probable that we should all fall in.'"

Alys did not cast things in the grandiose terms that her husband favored. But her gloominess was perhaps even less pliable. In 1907, she developed a lump in her breast. Upon discovering that it was not malignant, she confided to her diary that

> Now my blissful hope of six months is destroyed—even the chance of death. I do so long to leave Bertie free to live with a woman who . . . does not bore him desperately and get on his nerves as I do. . . . Little duties keep me going from day to day. But they don't satisfy the awful craving hunger for Bertie's love. . . . If only I could die—it's such a simple solution.

Russell eventually shook off his depression. Alys seems to have lived on with hers until the end. In the third volume of his *Autobiography*, Russell reproduces a handful of letters he received from Alys in 1950, a year before her death. Having divorced in 1921 so that Russell could marry Dora Black, they had been completely out of touch for thirty years. He concludes by reprinting a pathetic passage from Alys's own memoirs. "Bertie was an ideal companion," Alys wrote, but "I was never clever enough for him, and perhaps he was too sophisticated for me. . . . Unfortunately, I was neither wise enough nor courageous enough to prevent this one disaster from shattering my capacity for happiness and my zest for life." Somehow, Bertie's insight that "in human relations one should penetrate to the core of loneliness in each person and speak to that" did not apply to Alys.

A public rupture with Alys did not come until 1911 when Russell began his affair with Ottoline Morrell. Though he had known her slightly before, his intimacy began when he went to work canvassing for her husband, Philip Edward Morrell, a Liberal MP. After having dined with Ottoline in London one night when Philip was away, Russell recalled,

> the conversation gradually became more intimate. Making timid approaches, I found them to my surprise not repulsed. . . . For external and accidental reasons, I did not have full relations with Ottoline that evening, but we agreed to become lovers as soon as possible. . . . It was already late when we first kissed, and after that, though we stayed up till four in the morning, the conversation was intermittent.

Russell always seemed more taken with her than she with him. Ottoline, while conced-

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ing that "no woman is dead to the flattering influence of a great man's passion," noted in her memoirs that "my imagination was swept away, but not my heart." Russell's letters to her are not decorated with *thee*s and *thine*s, which is something, but the saccharine content remained high: "Dearest my whole soul is flooded with joy—your radiance shines before me and I feel still your arms about me and your kiss on my lips. You have become to me something holy; my touch will be gentle because I reverence you. Our love shall be always sacred, and I will give you a devotion worthy even of you. You have released in me imprisoned voices that sing the beauty of the world," etc., etc.

For several years, Ottoline was Russell's most important confidante, though he was never her only romantic interest. In the end, their relationship seems to have foundered on the question of sex. In fact, Ottoline typically seemed more interested in collecting admirers (Augustus John and Roger Fry were among her suitors) than sleeping with them. But for the newly awakened Russell, her sexual aloofness was frustrating. "In the spiritual region you do most fully satisfy me," he wrote in 1912. "But my lower nature sometimes yearns after the simple happiness I used to have at first." "Loving you," he wrote later, "is like loving a red-hot poker."

One solution was taking other lovers. In the spring of 1914, Russell came to the United States to teach at Harvard for a semester. He described Cambridge, Massachusetts, as "a soul-destroying atmosphere," Harvard as a "*ghastly*" place full of "*awful* people." It was during this stint at Harvard that Russell first met T. S. Eliot, inspiring the early poem "Mr. Apollinax." It was also during this trip that Russell commenced a sporadic affair with Helen Dudley, a girl he met in Chicago. He promptly reported the incident to Ottoline. "I do not want you to think that this will make the very *smallest* difference in my feeling towards you," he wrote, "beyond removing the irritation of unsatisfied instinct." Besides, he continued, Helen was "not good looking—her mouth, and still more her nose, very ugly." Calculated or not, Russell's confession led to a brief recrudescence of his sexual relations with Ottoline.

Like many academic commentators on Russell, Professor Griffin holds Russell in very high esteem. He does not, like A. J. Ayer, conclude with the exclamation that Russell was "a great and good man." But a conviction of Russell's essential high-mindedness is presupposed throughout his notes and commentary. In truth, though, Russell emerges as a deeply ambivalent—not to say discreditable—figure in these pages. He was charming, witty, and unfailingly generous with money. But if his brilliance and generosity are undeniable, so too are his moral high-handedness, his gloomy self-righteousness, his priggishness—what in his *Autobiography* he grandly called his "unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind." How much mankind has had to suffer at the hands of those who pity it! Combined with his inveterate zeal for reform, Russell's deployment of pity consistently nurtured a wide variety of utopian schemes. In a letter to Alys about socialism and "the woman question," for example, he writes:

> Thee might observe incidentally that if the state paid for child-bearing it might and ought to require a medical certificate that the parents were such as to give a reasonable result of a healthy child—this would afford a very good inducement to some sort of care for the race, and gradually as public opinion became educated by the law, it might react on the law and make that more stringent, until one got to some state of things in which there would be a little genuine care for the race, instead of the present haphazard higgledy-piggledy ways.

Nor was Russell's utopianism confined to eugenics and family planning. In *Political Ideals* (1917), he suggests that with intelligent use of modern technology mankind could shortly "abolish all abject poverty, quite half the illness in the world, the whole economic slavery which binds down nine-

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tenths of our population: we could fill the world with beauty and joy, and secure the reign of universal peace." Whatever fondness Russell had felt for Aldous Huxley faded after Huxley portrayed him as the unpleasant Mr. Scogan in *Crome Yellow*. But many of Russell's pronouncements on social engineering might have come from one of Huxley's grim distopian novels. Think, for example, of Russell's confident prediction in "What I Believe" (1925) that physiology and psychology would soon enable us "to produce far more the type of human beings that we admire. Intelligence, artistic capacity, benevolence—all these things could be increased by science. There seems scarcely any limit to what *could* be done in the way of producing a good world if only men would use science wisely."

Russell's glee about the beneficence of science paled noticeably with the advent of nuclear weapons. But his appetite for alarming international scenarios was left undiminished. Although he attempted to deny it later, shortly after World War II he several times advocated that the United States initiate a "preventive war" against the Soviet Union. "A *casus belli*," he explained, "would not be difficult to find." In the mid-Fifties, he did an about-face and began agitating vociferously for disarmament. Ever since a trip to the Soviet Union in 1920, Russell had been a staunch anti-Communist. (Lenin's Russia, he observed, was "a close tyrannical bureaucracy, with a spy system more elaborate and terrible than the Tsar's.") But now an uncontrollable anti-Americanism took precedence: America, not the Soviet Union, became the emblem of political iniquity. In 1961, he delivered himself of a particularly violent burst of moral hysteria. "We used to think Hitler was wicked when he wanted to kill all the Jews," he said in a speech. "But Kennedy and Macmillan not only want to kill all the Jews but all the rest of us too. They're much more wicked than Hitler. . . . They are the wickedest people that ever lived in the history of man."

In part, Russell's political buffoonery stemmed from what the British historian Maurice Cowling identified as Russell's attempt to generalize "the intelligentsia's values to the whole of life." If only the world would listen to him, the great logician and philosopher, peace, prosperity, and universal happiness would be promptly forthcoming. Alas, Russell never seemed to realize that the kind of consistency he could demand of a philosophical argument was unattainable in a world populated by human beings. It is significant that Russell had great difficulty remembering faces: he resorted to memorizing verbal descriptions of people, even friends, in order to recognize them. John Maynard Keynes summed it up neatly when, reminiscing about the intellectual climate of Cambridge before the First World War, he noted that "Bertie in particular sustained simultaneously a pair of opinions ludicrously incompatible. He held that in fact human affairs were carried on after a most irrational fashion, but that the remedy was quite simple and easy, since all we had to do was to carry them on rationally." Beatrice Webb went deeper in a diary entry from 1902:

> Bertrand Russell's nature is pathetic in its subtle absoluteness: faith in an absolute logic, absolute ethic, absolute beauty, and all of the most refined and rarified type. His abstract and revolutionary methods of thought and the uncompromising way in which he applies these frightens me for his future and the future of those who love him or whom he loves. Compromise, mitigation, mixed motive, phases of health of body and mind, qualified statements, uncertain feelings, all seem unknown to him.

It is easy to conclude, with Beatrice Webb, that Russell's ruling characteristic was an overweening desire for certainty. In a postscript to the third volume of his *Autobiography*, for example, he wrote that "I wanted certainty in the kind of way in which people want religious faith." And certainty, indeed, was part of the mesmerizing appeal that mathematics held for him. "The world of mathematics," he wrote in 1901, "is really a beautiful world; it has nothing to do with

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life and death and human sordidness, but is eternal, cold and passionless." And yet, as one reflects on Russell's philosophical career, it appears that behind this thirst for certainty there lurked an even deeper craving for disillusionment. Thus it is that in one of his first letters to Ottoline he described himself as "a sort of logic machine warranted to destroy every ideal that is not very robust." The truth is that Russell regarded the very prospect of certainty as a challenge or affront. His quest for certainty was undertaken chiefly to establish its impossibility, not to secure it. This is one reason why Russell was so dismissive of religious faith: here he was confronted with a realm of experience that refused to submit itself absolutely to his scrutiny and dissection.

The union of Russell's desire for certainty and passion for disillusionment may also help to explain the curious air of unreality that attends so much of his thought. Whether the subject is logic, religion, society, or morals, Russell's approach is likely to impress one first of all by its cleverness and then by its artificiality. In a discussion of Russell's philosophy of Logical Atomism, the attempt "to construct the universe out of sense data," George Santayana commented that, although it seems coolly realistic, Russell's theory is really "marvellously like empirical idealism. It has the same 'nothing but' quality: it is a substitution of means for ends and an analysis of knowledge for the object of it." *The substitution of an analysis of knowledge for the object of knowledge*: perhaps this is what T. S. Eliot had in mind when he said that Russell's "lucidity is often that of a mirror rather than that of clear water."

And this brings us to what a pragmatist might call the "cash value" of Russell's philosophy. The *Principia Mathematica* is indisputably a monument of twentieth-century thought. It will, as the British philosopher Roger Scruton remarks, "be remembered as long as civilisation lasts." But it is an inaccessible monument. Russell himself once conjectured that only six people had read it all the way through. In this context, it is noteworthy that Russell regarded his solution to an abstruse logical paradox about class membership as his single greatest contribution to philosophy. Supposing he was right about this: what should we make of it? Logical paradoxes have accompanied philosophical inquiry at least since the time of Zeno. But only someone addicted to epistemological arrogance would elevate them to the center of the philosophical enterprise or conclude that they demonstrate the futility of reason. The operation of reason generates paradoxes as surely as the sun casts shadows. In neither case are we justified in concluding that patches of darkness mean that nothing is illuminated.

In a review of this volume of letters, a prominent academic philosopher proudly noted that Russell did much to foster the "professionalization" of philosophy. This is undoubtedly true. Not only modern logical notation, but also the entire image of philosophy as a kind of intellectual janitorial service in which propositions must be tidied up or discarded owes a tremendous amount to Russell's example. It is less clear, however, that the professionalization of philosophy has been a blessing—except, perhaps, for professors of philosophy. Modern analytic philosophy has tended to assume, with Russell, that "all fundamental work in philosophy is logical." But is this in fact the case? What about the ethical dimension of philosophy, the notion that philosophy is fundamentally about the "love of wisdom"? What about the idea that the chief impetus for philosophy is the question, How should I live my life? At the end of the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates say that the aim of philosophy is to enable us "to distinguish the life that is good from that which is bad, and always and everywhere to choose the best that the conditions allow." Socrates was not talking about logic. It was Russell's mistake, and philosophy's misfortune, to suppose otherwise.

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The cry from the orchestras

by Samuel Lipman

The recent publication by the American Symphony Orchestra League, an advocacy group located in Washington, D.C., of an extensive report on "The Financial Condition of Symphony Orchestras" [1] has finally brought some unpleasant problems of contemporary orchestral life to the surface. As the title of the report suggests, the problems discussed are mostly pecuniary, but given that in a democratic and free-market society money inevitably functions as a standard of value, economic considerations have a lot to tell us even about the fate of orchestral music as an art.

The findings of the report will hardly come as a surprise to those who are involved in orchestral life or who have closely watched the orchestral scene as musicians and critics. Deficits are growing; expenses are increasing, seemingly uncontrollably, and marketing and fund-raising expenses are increasing fastest. While the total number of performances has declined since 1971, the total audience has increased, because orchestras now serve more people per performance; nevertheless, each audience member requires a subsidy (the difference between the cost of an individual ticket and the expense per ticket-buyer of putting the concert on) that has increased more than five-fold since 1971. Private funding, though increasing, represents one-third less of the total amount of arts philanthropy than it did two decades ago. Government support has declined since 1986. Endowments, though increasing, will be eroded by the growing need to transfer funds from endowments to annual operating expenses. The economically hardest hit are the smaller orchestras, with the major institutions in relatively good shape and those serving smaller communities in parlous condition. The report concludes that "the industry as a whole appears to be in the worst shape it has ever been in. . . . [U]nless changes are made in the way orchestras do business—changes that are substantial and systemic—the future health of the orchestra industry is in serious jeopardy."

So much for the findings and the conclusion. The weight of the report, however, hardly seems to lie in the cold data, disconcerting as they are. Much more interesting is the presentation made by Dr. Thomas Wolf, the Project Director responsible for the report. It must not be thought that Dr. Wolf is a mere administrator or social scientist. He is, in fact, a flutist who has played professionally, including a solo appearance as a youngster with the Philadelphia Orchestra; furthermore, he is the nephew of the once-famous duo-piano team of (Pierre) Luboshutz and (Genia) Nemenoff. So it is fitting that, at the very end of his presentation, he sounds a note not just of warning but of mourning.

1 The ASOL report is in three parts. The first, titled "The Orchestra Industry," is a summary, and the second and third are compilations of statistics and data on which that summary is based. It is the summary that I shall discuss in this article.

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Dr. Wolf begins his presentation by going back to 1966 and speculating on the thoughts of a typical trustee of a major orchestra as he contemplates the past, present, and future of his institution. Artistically, matters seem in good shape; the orchestra is one of the largest in the nation, the conductor is world-famous. But what had just after World War II seemed an institution of manageable size, with a limited season, contented musicians, a lean administrative staff, and a reliable and small (but sufficient) group of major patrons, has now changed into big business. The budget has grown staggeringly; the musicians want a fifty-two-week contract, and, in the process of labor negotiations, the relationships between musicians and management, and musicians and board, have significantly deteriorated. The trustees alone are no longer able to cover the increasing deficits. But help may be on the way. Private foundations are becoming interested in the arts in general and in orchestras in particular. Behind this institutionalized private-sector support lies an even greater hope: the National Endowment for the Arts, though still small in resources, seems to provide the possibility of major government subsidies, joined in by the states.

But then Dr. Wolf goes on to contrast this mixed picture with the mood of a typical trustee in 1991—perhaps the son of the trustee of 1966. For Dr. Wolf, this new breed of trustee is highly proud "that his orchestra is playing better than ever before and is considered one of the greatest arts institutions in the world"; part of this distinction has been achieved by the orchestra's "attempt to attract the very best players by continually increasing weekly salaries." But government support has rapidly dropped; labor agreements have forced the orchestra to agree to pay its musicians for the playing of more concerts than audiences can be found to attend; major sums must be transferred each year from the endowment to meet operating deficits. Furthermore, funders now "talk about an ever increasing multicultural society in which a European-based symphony orchestra is less relevant to growing segments of American society." Further still (as Dr. Wolf's trustee sees the situation), the lack of arts education may well be responsible for the "growing preference for pops programs" and the lack of willingness "to commit to an entire season of classical music concerts." And finally there is vastly increased competition for leisure-time activities from other arts organizations, sports, and television, and this competition can only be met—if it can be met at all—by spending vastly greater sums on fund-raising and ticket-marketing.

Dr. Wolf then devotes a short paragraph to discussing the present thoughts of a trustee of a small orchestra. Here he finds similar worries, though with an added twist: smaller orchestras have been able to keep their financial heads above water only by raising musicians' salaries at a rate considerably below that of inflation, and by lowering the number of full-time players engaged for the entire season. These erstwhile full-time players are now replaced as required by part-timers, who need be paid only for the concerts they actually play.[2]

As Dr. Wolf, now giving his own thoughts, looks to the future, he sees no hope for increased government support, again because of the pressures of a multicultural society. Nor does he think that larger endowments, even if possible, are the answer, for will they not "simply be yet another invitation to ratchet up the expenses of orchestras as has occurred each time orchestra endowments have increased in the past?" Going beyond endowment-giving to annual operating support, he is gloomy about the willingness of private funders to fill the vacuum created by rising expenses and declining government funding.

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2 In connection with the problem of the smaller orchestras, an article by Andrew L. Yarrow in *The New York Times* (August 2, 1992) describes the current plight, involving shorter seasons, lowered musicians' wages, and the need for ever more popular programming, of such once expanding ensembles as the Long Island Philharmonic, the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, and the New Haven Symphony.

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And so Dr. Wolf, in conformity with the latest buzz-thinking, suggests the possibility of a "New Paradigm." For him, "the orchestra industry must undergo a paradigm shift—not a process of small-scale, selective tinkering but a basic transformation in the way business is conducted." I think it fair to say that Dr. Wolf himself does not have any definitive "new paradigm" structure in mind; it could well be maintained that merely using the word "paradigm," so redolent, in a non-specific way, of the social sciences in their palmy days, befuddles rather than clears the mind. But Dr. Wolf does provide a series of ten "rhetorical questions," and in these questions may be found his own thoughts on where we ought to look for some improvement in the orchestra world.

First, Dr. Wolf questions the viability of the full-time, full-size orchestra of ninety to one hundred players. Second, he questions whether orchestras should "market their wares primarily from a single venue [i.e., the concert hall]." Third, he asks whether there should continue to be more concerts than there are audiences to fill such halls. Fourth, he wonders whether orchestra activities should continue to "focus so heavily on performances before live audiences." Fifth, he asks how long orchestras can remain "all-white, upper-class institutions." Sixth, he wants to know when orchestras will develop and train "players of color." Seventh, he wants to know when orchestras will take a part in "school-based arts education." Eighth, he asks why orchestras aren't "forging local institutional partnerships . . . with other arts organizations, schools, tourism, sports, and economic development interests." Ninth, he inquires why orchestras have "not spent more time and effort making the concert-going experience more enticing to those who are not hard-core music lovers." And finally, he wants to know when there will be a new "collective decision-making structure . . . [including] the trustees, administrators, music director, *and the players* [emphasis in the original]."

Before I go on to take up Dr. Wolf's actually not-so-rhetorical questions, I should say that printed in the ASOL report along with his presentation are three responses: one from Deborah Borda, the managing director of the New York Philharmonic; a second from John McClaugherty, the president of the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra; and a third from Peter Pastreich, the executive director of the San Francisco Symphony. Miss Borda, after detailing the Philharmonic's new initiatives in concert presentation—Rush-Hour Series, Casual Concert Matinees, mini-festivals, and Children's Promenades (one assumes these last are pops concerts for the very young)—ends with what she sees as the "key" issue: bringing the orchestra musicians onto boards and into policy-making. Mr. McClaugherty responds by assuring his listeners that the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra has already put the answers suggested by Dr. Wolf's questions into successful practice. For his part, Mr. Pastreich, among the most intelligent of American orchestra managers, disagrees with the implications of many of Dr. Wolf's questions, including those about orchestra size, concert production in a central hall, and the future of live performance. He finds American orchestras to be upper-middle-class, not upper-class, institutions; he agrees about developing more black musicians, and points to his own and other orchestras' records in this regard; he finds it very difficult to make concerts more enticing, though he does favor easier availability of parking and refreshments, and experimenting with presenting close-ups of conductor and musicians on large television screens easily visible to the audience. About the new decision-making structure stressed by both Dr. Wolf and Miss Borda, Mr. Pastreich very diplomatically remarks only that "further words from me are unnecessary."

In all this, there is cold comfort indeed. The economic facts of the orchestral situation as described by Dr. Wolf are true enough: orchestras are now not economically viable and undoubtedly will become even less so as time passes. It is my impression that they have never been viable, any

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more than hospitals, libraries, and comprehensive schools have ever been viable. But it is surely no answer to say that matters in high culture, as in health and education, have always been difficult. They have, but something new has been added to this difficulty in the support of high culture, and specifically, in this case, of symphony orchestras. For one thing, the scale of non-viability has been increasing at a rapid rate: annual budgets of even second-tier orchestras now hover around the ten million dollar level, and large-orchestra budgets now regularly exceed twenty million dollars. A situation no longer exists in which a Maecenas —one thinks immediately of Henry Lee Higginson in Boston from the founding of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1881 to his withdrawal in 1918—can be found to support an orchestra's deficit completely out of his own funds.

To this increasing scale of non-viability has also been added a new element, one which is often suggested in the ASOL report but never, I think, fully confronted. The scale on which the American orchestral world operates, at least on the level of the first- and second-tier orchestras—say roughly from the Cleveland and Chicago to the Detroit and Cincinnati orchestras—is quite inelastic. There are fixed staffing levels in orchestras, and fixed compensation amounts; numbers of concerts are set at arbitrarily high levels simply because it is cheaper to use musicians, who must be paid anyway, than not to use them, even when audiences are small or nonexistent. Fees for celebrity artists—and make no mistake: only celebrities, not musical programs themselves, can draw the large audiences necessary to swell box-office receipts and generate the kind of aura necessary to raise money from donors —are extraordinarily high and, because their central role in the funding process is so well recognized, becoming higher. Ancillary costs —chief among them benefit packages—are also fixed and can only go higher.

What, then, about solutions? I will briefly take Dr. Wolf's question-answers as a starting point. First, must orchestras be so large? To play the great late-romantic repertory, the answer must be an unequivocal yes—that is, to play it as the composers intended it to sound. Is there any point in giving, with reduced forces, what would merely be simulacra of the works of, for example, Strauss and Mahler? Perhaps, but I would say that to attempt to do so, or simply to eliminate these works altogether, would only be to render it more, rather than less, difficult to attract audiences and donors. Could the performance of large-scale works be restricted to just a few concerts each season, with extra players hired to fill in? Again perhaps, but the inevitable consequence of such a policy would be a lowering of performance quality and serious labor strife.

Second, how important is scheduling most of an orchestra's performances at its home hall? Very important, because an orchestra's characteristic sound—what makes it great, if it indeed is great—is the result of the combination of its playing and the particular acoustic environment in which it has learned to play as an ensemble. An itinerant orchestra, often playing under unsatisfactory conditions, after incessant traveling, would be analogous to a military field hospital—at best, merely better than nothing. I need hardly also mention that a major orchestra is an adornment to the life of the central city, and that preserving the relation of cultured elites to the central city is an important part of any intelligent urban policy.

Third, must there be so many concerts? The answer to this question can only come from a consideration of the *musical* justification for each event. Should there be so many pops concerts, if their only *raison d'être* is earning revenue and using up the musicians' contracted services? The answer in this case is clearly no. If the question, however, is whether there should be sufficient concerts to expose the repertory of great music to old and new audiences, then the answer is clearly yes.

Fourth, should the focus of concert-giving not be shifted from live concerts

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before finite audiences in concert halls to (presumably) infinite audiences out there in medialand? Here I think that there must be some distinctions drawn. Sound recordings —formerly LPs and now CDs—provide, at their best, marvelous ways to hear great music in great performances, even if they can hardly provide all the individuality, force, and authenticity of truly live performance; it must be said, too, that recorded performances, no matter how excellent, cannot provide the social experience of music, the gathering-together of people with shared expectations, commitments, and standards. Still, as favorable as one's general verdict on *sound* recordings must be, the situation seems to me quite different with visual reproductions—television concerts and the various kinds of video tapes and discs. Here the visual image is imprisoned on a more or less small screen, with the images presented being *entirely* at the control of ego-ridden performers and sensation-mongering directors. MTV, I am afraid, remains MTV whether it presents Paula Abdul or Herbert von Karajan. The real uses of televised concerts are two: to build audiences for live concerts, and to provide permanent evidence of the state of music performance, both aurally and visually, at a given moment in music history. Put another way, video concerts are either advertisements or historical documents, but only incompletely artistic experiences.

With his fifth rhetorical question, Dr. Wolf begins to get down to brass tacks. So important is his question that I shall repeat it in his own words: "How much longer can American orchestras remain all-white, upper-class institutions?" He answers his own question: "It is because only 3% of our trustees and 2% of our players are black." I will tell Dr. Wolf what I am sure will not come as a shock to him, though he will perhaps be unhappy about admitting his foreknowledge: trustees are chosen for their ability and their willingness to give money to the orchestra, not for their color. I have never known an orchestra to refuse a contribution, with all the rights and privileges thereunto appertaining, for reasons of color. Similarly, orchestra players are chosen for their ability to perform the tasks demanded of them. I have never known a conductor who would turn down a minority orchestral applicant for any other but professional reasons. On the contrary, *every* conductor I know is actively on the lookout for minority musicians; the problem is not in the hiring but in the supply.

Why are there so few black orchestral musicians? Partly, of course, because of the lack of early educational opportunities, not just for blacks but for all our young children.[3] But I suspect there is another and vastly more important reason for the lack of black orchestra players of classical music: black children, who are at the mercy of school and media, have been told time and time again that classical music is not their music, that the white man's art is not their art, and that being black means *not* doing what whites do. It is white progressives, false though noisy friends of blacks, who are responsible for "turning off" blacks, not just to classical music but to the rest of the high art that is so mercilessly castigated as the work of "dead, white, European males."

And so Dr. Wolf's sixth question—when will orchestras train and develop "players of color"?—answers itself: it will happen when those responsible for the image of orchestras—trustees, administrators, and the cultural media alike—decide that orchestral music is what minorities should be devoting themselves to. Only then will they provide the resources, and above all the encouraging atmosphere, that all really serious study

3 One might well ask why there are so few black orchestral musicians when, at the same time, there are and have been so many black opera singers of fame and distinction—Marian Anderson, Dorothy Maynor, and Leontyne Price, for example, or, more recently, Jessye Norman and Kathleen Battle. The reason for this discrepancy is that fewer blacks than whites have had the opportunity for the intensive study and practice in early youth that instrumental training requires. Singing is much more a matter of pure talent and can be successfully cultivated in early adulthood.

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needs. But as long as whites repeat *ad nauseam* that the true role models for blacks are sport stars and TV personalities, there is no hope whatsoever for utilizing the huge reservoir of talent that lies imprisoned in the black casualties of white do-gooding.

Seventh, what about the relation between orchestras and music education? Here the answer is that our cultural leaders have everywhere propounded a doctrine that to be an artist means to make art, not to teach it. In the supposedly terrible old days, before the Ford Foundation orchestral subsidy programs in the 1960s, just before the founding of the National Endowment for the Arts, there were no year-round orchestra seasons, and there were in general fewer concerts during the winter season. And so the best orchestra musicians took it for granted that they would teach, that they would pass on their knowledge to a new generation. Now very few do so, and orchestral teaching has retreated into the sterile world of colleges and universities, where living music has increasingly become a dead academic subject. Orchestras, furthermore, are very unwilling to spend any of their resources on any kind of education that does not fulfill the goal of using up the contracted minimums hammered out in union agreements. I am afraid that when orchestras do attempt any kind of real education at all, it too often consists of photo opportunities for the press and television news programs.

Eighth, what about institutional partnerships? Here I think Dr. Wolf has succumbed to an understandable tendency to pad his material. Orchestras are not about tourism or sports; orchestras exist for the community of music lovers who are near enough to come to concerts. Some tourists, doubtless, will come to concerts, if the concerts are good enough to command their interest: if they are, I have no doubt that these tourists will know about the events through that most reliable of musical advertising techniques, word-of-mouth. With sports, serious music should have nothing whatsoever to do at all; sports, in all its false glamour and hype, in all its economic power and its corruption of manners, has already had too much to do with forming the environment surrounding every high cultural activity in this country.

Ninth, what about making concerts more "enticing"? Dr. Wolf, in recounting what a non-musician recently said to him, provides the germ of an answer to his own question: "We are such a visual society," his friend said. "When are orchestras going to get smart and build a visual component into the concert-going experience?" The answer is simple: it will happen when orchestra players stop being musicians and start becoming actors. Luciano Pavarotti has done it already, so why not the concertmasters of our orchestras, and all the first-chair players as well? But has one ever wanted to hear an actor play a musical instrument? Then why should one want to watch a musician act?

And then there is Dr. Wolf's final question, that about changing the "decision-making structure" in our orchestras. On one level, this is merely a reasonable request for an atmosphere of cooperation between players and management when cuts have to be made and seasons have to be shortened. But on another level this is a request to free a leadership elite—the trustees about whose opinions in 1966 and 1991 Dr. Wolf earlier speculated—from the burden of their trusteeship. The musicians, in other words, must become the agents of the cutting-back of their own careers. Though Dr. Wolf does not say so, I believe that he must somewhere know that in city after city trustees are beginning to throw in the towel, to say that the responsibilities of running a symphony orchestra are too much for their cultural commitment and their economic resources.

Now that I have come to the end of my cursory responses to Dr. Wolf's ten points, I must say that it seems to me that his presentation is fatally flawed by a refusal to examine the loss of commitment on the part of trustee elites I have referred to above. The problem, I am afraid, is not their lack of financial resources; new fortunes, made over the past two decades, have flooded our country. But

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these fortunes are simply not available for orchestras. There is only one reason they are not available: it is because those with the money to give do not also have the desire to hear the great music they are being asked to support. Over the past two decades, money has poured into the avant-garde visual arts in scarcely imaginable amounts; both the level of the art market and the plethora of new museums (as well as the expansion of old ones) are ample testimony to the money available for the arts. But it is not available, I repeat, for the orchestras, and it is not available because of a shift in elite taste. There is nothing in the ASOL report to suggest a single reason why a shift in elite taste back to the orchestras should take place. There is nothing to suggest a single argument for the place of great music in the making and the continuation of Western intellectual civilization—in fact the only universal civilization, as any Third World political leader with a serious illness knows when it comes time for his medical treatment.

For myself, I do not see the doubt about the future of our symphony orchestras on the faces of those who come to concerts. I do not see it in the people who buy CDs of Bach and Mozart, of Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky. I do not even see it in the many orchestra musicians I know and and on occasion work with. I *do* see it everywhere in our leadership elites, those previously responsible for supporting music. Instead of supporting music, they now talk about relevance; instead of teaching their children about civilization, they provide them with the latest excrescences of popular culture. Having no settled high cultural tastes of their own, and no memory of a time when leaders led, they look to the media elite to fill up their lives and their minds. As I read the American Symphony Orchestra League report on American orchestras, it became clear to me that the problem doesn't lie with musicians, and it doesn't lie with audiences. It lies with those at the American Symphony Orchestra League, elite representatives of symphonic music that they are, who always seem to lack strong musical convictions, and who can only spend their time and resources thinking of how to get others to do their work for them. A little self-confidence at the top, and a lot of courage and love of music too, certainly wouldn't hurt.

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That Sontag woman

by Bruce Bawer

In these times when charges of cultural elitism are routinely hurled by East Village poets at their formalist rivals, by *au courant* English professors at champions of the literary canon, and by the vice president of the United States at Hollywood producers, it seems particularly appropriate to ponder the career of Susan Sontag, who has for decades been the very apotheosis of a certain kind of cultural elitist. To be sure, the cultural elitist —if by those words one simply means a lover and defender of high culture—is at present perhaps the most precious and imperiled species in the artistic and intellectual bestiary. But Susan Sontag is the sort of cultural elitist for whom the term often seems primarily to designate not selfless devotion to certain valued things that exist apart from oneself but, rather, membership in a select class of people, an aristocracy of the mind. It sometimes seems as if Sontag's chief priority as an essayist is not to clarify, persuade, or illuminate, but to demonstrate to the world that she is the highest of the highbrows, an intellectual's intellectual, a breed apart from lesser scribblers.

How does she do this? Mostly by writing essays chockablock with provocative-sounding assertions about a subject—some of them genuinely perceptive but many of them dubious, pretentious, self-evident, and/or irreconcilable—and supporting few of them at length, but instead leaping briskly from one to another. What's more, she gratuitously sprinkles these essays with quotations from European intellectuals, references to obscure filmmakers, etc.—the purpose being not only to introduce relevant ideas but, even more important, to say "This is the company in which my mind moves," and to imply that if you're in her intellectual league you'll recognize the reference or the quotation. She has said herself, by way of accounting for her essays' discontinuity, that she doesn't have the patience to develop an argument from *a* to *b* to *c*. Another explanation might be that she is by nature less an originator or assimilator of ideas than a collector of them, a hero-worshiper; to read many a Sontag essay is to find undigested and discrepant fragments of her intellectual gods poking out all over the place—a bit of Roland Barthes here, a chunk of Walter Benjamin there.

Yet her critical method has proven, over the years, to have several strategic advantages for Sontag: (1) it keeps many readers constantly off-balance and thus intimidated at the thought that Sontag, bounding around inside a topic like a toddler in a playroom, is at home with all the esoteric material that she has managed to include; (2) it makes Sontag look as though her intellect is bursting with so many ideas that she can't spare much time for any given one of them; and (3) it moves so quickly past each of her contentions that the reader isn't encouraged to mull any of them over, to ask: "Is this true? Does that make sense? Is this consistent with that?" To read her alongside

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someone like Guy Davenport, whose essays bear a superficial resemblance to hers in many respects (e.g., the formal discontinuity, the frequent highbrow name-dropping and quoting, the attraction to demanding and obscure literary works and to extreme political and sexual phenomena), is to appreciate more than ever Davenport's captivating and elegant prose, his eagerness to comprehend and clarify, his lack of interest in obscuring or making an impression. While Sontag is all over the place, strip-mining the intellectual landscape, Davenport is sinking a shaft. Reigning over the New York intellectual scene, plugged into every trend, Sontag is a writer very much of the moment, whose essays read like self-conscious footnotes to the history of the time in which they were written; Davenport is a writer for the ages. Her temperament is essentially romantic, postmodern; his is classical, modern.

"Taste is context," she insisted in a 1974 essay, "Fascinating Fascism." The remark is elucidated by a passage in her new novel, *The Volcano Lover*,[1] in which the narrator, describing Josiah Wedgwood's late eighteenth-century mass production of copies of the Portland Vase, asks: "Who can really love the Portland Vase now?"—the point being that manufacturing thousands of replicas of a beautiful object destroys its beauty, not because such copies are aesthetically inferior, but because an essential ingredient of the object's appeal is its *exclusiveness*, its status as a unique object esteemed by a coterie of connoisseurs. Implicit here is that the essence of the Church of High Culture abides not in the inherent qualities of the objects of worship but in the inherent qualities of the worshipers. This view of things, I would submit, lies at the heart of Sontag's brand of elitism; and the notion, following logically upon such a view, that anything that happens to interest highbrow minds, even as a diversion, should necessarily be taken seriously as art or idea, goes a long way toward explaining Sontag's attempts to certify pornography and Camp as legitimate objects of serious critical inquiry.

It is difficult to find in Sontag's fiction any indication that she has ever given a moment's thought to what life might be like for someone other than an artist or intellectual. Her 1963 novel *The Benefactor* (whose solemnly cerebral tone and stark Continental *mise en scène* recall Camus and Canetti, among others) centers on a young Paris intellectual, and draws a hilarious contrast between his earnest, sophomoric hyperintellectuality and his complete lack of common sense, human sympathy, and emotional self-knowledge. (The novel's major problem is that one cannot be sure that Sontag actually meant for the book to be funny.) Her other novel, the labored, humorless *Death Kit* (1967), is so entirely derivative of the New Novel of Nathalie Sarraute and Alain Robbe-Grillet that even to speak of it as taking place in the world (as opposed to the author's mind) is rather to miss the point. In the self-consciously avant-garde bits and pieces collected in *I, etcetera* (1978), the only characters who aren't intellectual types are the cleaning ladies and other peripheral underlings. And the effective story "The Way We Live Now" (which appeared last year as a book) concerns a circle of highbrows with names like Tanya, Orson, Quentin, and Yvonne, whose lives are touched by the AIDS epidemic; when the narrator mentions on the first page that "Stephen . . . was back from the conference in Helsinki," it's clear who the "we" of Sontag's title are—and who they aren't.

A seminal document in the history of Sontag's cultural elitism, of course, is her notorious 1968 essay "Trip to Hanoi," in which she managed to be taken in by North Vietnamese propaganda crude enough to make an eighth grader wince. How did this happen? As the essay makes clear, part of the explanation is that Sontag's interest in Ho Chi Minh's revolution had less to do with her concern for the masses than with her enthusiasm for new experiences, her vulnerability to flattery, her love of glamour, and her desire to be where the action was.

1 *The Volcano Lover: A Romance*, by Susan Sontag; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 419 pages, $22.

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Apropos of her Hanoi visit, she observes that "[a]n event that makes new feelings conscious is always the most important experience a person can have": in other words, what ultimately mattered most to her about the Vietnam conflict was not its potential consequences for the people of Indochina or America or the world but its effect upon her own psychic development. "The aesthete's radicalism," she writes in a 1981 essay on Roland Barthes, "is the radicalism of a privileged, even a replete, consciousness—but a genuine radicalism nonetheless. . . . The aesthete's radicalism: to be multiple, to make multiple identifications; to assume fully the privilege of the personal." Indeed, a reader of "Trip to Hanoi" cannot help feeling that for Sontag, circa 1968, the ordeals and emotions of American servicemen, South Vietnamese civilians, and others with whom she could not readily identify had no more reality or urgency than her theories about them; to express it a bit differently, she emulates Barthes in viewing the world around her as if it were a text. (As Alfred Kazin once put it, Sontag "sees the world as a series of propositions *about* the world.")

Sontag has been castigated for proclaiming that "the white race is the cancer of human history," but given her nearly slavish reverence for European life and culture, one can only imagine that, on some level, this proclamation is to be understood as a disguised compliment; perhaps it was informed by a notion that culture and "cancer" are two sides of the same coin—that you can't produce great works of art or architecture or scholarship without also spawning imperial ambitions and aggressiveness. Could it be that she was so easily taken in by North Vietnamese propaganda because she simply didn't think a people with such modest cultural and intellectual attainments could be capable of lies and atrocities that would dwarf those of the American government?

If I have dwelt at some length on the subject of Sontag's particular brand of cultural elitism, it is because it plays an important role in *The Volcano Lover*. At the center of this historical novel—or, to use Sontag's word, this "romance"—is Sir William Hamilton, the English ambassador to Naples from 1764 to 1800, who is known to posterity as the husband of Horatio Nelson's mistress, Lady Emma Hamilton. The book chronicles the last years of Hamilton's first marriage, to a plain, devoted pianist named Catherine, and the whole of his marriage to Emma, during which the chief dramatic interest is provided by her involvement with Nelson and the English-aided struggle against French-backed republican rebels for control of the Kingdom of Naples, whose rulers, King Ferdinand II and Queen Maria Carolina, are close friends of the Hamiltons.

At first blush, the story of Nelson and the Hamiltons hardly seems like the sort of thing you'd expect to find retold in a Susan Sontag novel. After all, this is vintage romance-novel territory; it was even the subject of a movie with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh—and not an obscure French film of the sort that *cinéaste* Sontag adores, but a stiff costume drama, released in America under the title *That Hamilton Woman*, that one can imagine her gagging over (though in earlier days, come to think of it, she might have celebrated it as Camp). The costume-drama stereotypes implicit in the material are deliberately underscored by Sontag's habit of referring to Nelson as "the hero," to Hamilton as "the Cavaliere," to Emma as "the Cavaliere's wife," and to the Neapolitan sovereigns as "the king" and "the queen." (Nelson's name is never mentioned, nor are those of the royal couple; Hamilton isn't named until the last two pages.) But Sontag's purpose in using these fanciful labels is ironic; for her characters are like nothing out of a romance novel or a prestige picture by Alexander Korda. Only the suave, cultivated Cavaliere—who gets his thrills by hiking to the summit of Vesuvius and his aesthetic pleasures from the *objets d'art* of which he is a famous collector—comes close.

This is a very discursive novel, full of narratorial opinions about one thing and another, notably about collecting (a pet topic

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of Walter Benjamin's). In tone and perspective the narrator's remarks on the subject are entirely reminiscent of Sontag's essays; as in her essays, moreover, the remarks add up not to an argument but to a sort of inventory of provocative-sounding observations that are, by turns, dubious, pretentious, self-evident, and irreconcilable. Page 70: "There are so many objects. There is no such thing as a monogamous collector. Sight is a promiscuous sense. The avid gaze always wants more." Page 106: "Collectors and curators of collections often admit without too much prodding to misanthropic feelings. They confirm that, yes, they have cared more for inanimate things than for people."

Gradually it becomes clear that these seemingly random observations about collecting point to what Sontag apparently perceives as the connoisseur's ultimate dilemma: namely, that to love and collect beautiful things can place one in a problematic relationship with most of humankind. Napoleon, we are reminded, was a collector, stealing art from all over the Continent. Page 72: "Every collector is potentially (if not actually) a thief." For the Cavaliere's rich, eccentric nephew William, collecting is a way of excluding the world; for the Cavaliere, it is a means of connection to it. Page 245: "[T]he Cavaliere, like all great collectors, wished to say with objects: look at all the beauty and interest there is in the world." But the pieces in a Sicilian prince's grotesque collection, which the Cavaliere examines after he and Emma and the royal party have been forced by republican revolutionaries to flee Naples for Palermo, are different. "They said: the world is mad. Ordinary life is ridiculous, if you take some distance from it. Anything can turn into anything else, anything can be dangerous, anything can collapse, give way." Collecting, we are meant to understand, is of particularly urgent sociopolitical significance in an age of revolution:

> Collectors have a divided consciousness. No one is more naturally allied with the forces in a society that preserve and conserve. But every collector is also an accomplice of the ideal of destruction. For the very excessiveness of the collecting passion makes a collector also a self-despiser. Every collector-passion contains within it the fantasy of its own self-abolition. Worn down by the disparity between the collector's need to idealize and all that is base, purely materialistic, in the soul of a lover of beautiful objects and trophies of the glorious past, he may long to be purged by a consuming fire.

Which apparently helps to account for the Cavaliere's fascination with Vesuvius. He is, we are told, a "connoisseur of disaster" who is "ill-prepared . . . for the real thing" (i.e., revolution). He is also fascinated by Emma, who enters his life when his nephew Charles, whose mistress she was, tires of her company. Wondrously sensitive and empathic, this humbly born young woman becomes to the aging Cavaliere something of an artwork, a cherished part of his collection, famous for her beauty and for the *tableaux vivants* of classical scenes that she offers up regularly to dinner guests. Yet she is also big, loud, and vulgar, and has a checkered past; by the time Nelson enters her life, moreover, she is getting a bit long in the tooth and is "thickened by drink." Nelson, for his part, is even less of a stereotypical romance-novel protagonist than she is. Napoleon's nemesis, "*the* hero to the rulers of Naples," is "maimed, toothless, worn, underweight," and considerably shorter than Emma. ("It was," Sontag writes, "a time for concentrated men of preposterous ambition and small stature who needed no more than four hours of sleep a night.")

On the whole, Sontag's prose here is less than fastidious—by turns slack and frantic, deft and clumsy. Emma is "engulfed in the ecstasy of being alive"; the Cavaliere, visiting Paestum, "avowed himself irritated by the stumpy, conically shaped Doric columns." Confused, overwrought metaphors abound: "He ferried himself past one vortex of melancholy after another, by means of an astonishing spread of enthusiasms." There are even grammatical errors: "If she could have, if he would have permitted it, she

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would have gladly gone, booted and bundled up in furs, on the boar hunt with the Cavaliere." Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun is introduced to the reader as "one of the few professional painters who was [!] a woman." A description of a flea-market crowd as "Vulpine, larking"—a seeming contradiction—suggests that even on the rare occasion when Sontag endeavors to set a picture before the reader, she doesn't really see it herself. But then this is a novel whose chief purpose is manifestly not to capture the sights and sounds of eighteenth-century Naples but to serve as a framework for the author's cerebrations; it is an act of will rather than of visionary compulsion, a work crowded with ideas rather than with life.

To be sure, there are many forceful passages here, including graphic descriptions of battle casualties, mob rioting and its consequences, and the punishments meted out to republican revolutionaries. Sontag is good, too, at rendering the Cavaliere's state of mind: when Emma tells a lie at dinner, the rapid succession of emotions with which he reacts to it is convincing and sensitively evoked. Skillful as Sontag can be at delineating her characters' psychology, however, she only rarely attempts to convey a sense of them through dramatic action; instead of showing, she tells. Thus we don't feel as if we know them in the way a friend would, even if at times we feel as if we have a pretty good idea of what it is like to *be* them.

This novel is set, Sontag's narrator tells us, in a time "when all ethical obligations were first put up for scrutiny, the beginning of the time we call modern . . . the beginning of the age of revolutions." For Sontag, the Cavaliere's collecting becomes the quintessential symbol of pre-revolutionary civilization ("To collect is, by definition, to collect the past—while to make a revolution is to condemn what is now called the past"), and the Cavaliere a prototypical pre-modern figure: "Everything should be understood, and anything can be transformed—that is the modern view. . . . The Cavaliere was not trying to understand more than he already did. The collector's impulse does not encourage the lust to understand or to transform. Collecting is a form of union. The collector is acknowledging. He is adding. He is learning. He is noting." It is only appropriate that when Goethe, the poet of the new sensibility, meets the Cavaliere, he condemns him in his thoughts as "a simple-minded epicurean . . . a man incapable of delving deeply into what interested him."

It seems significant that Sontag calls *The Volcano Lover* not a novel but a romance—a word that Hawthorne used to describe works of fiction that, as he wrote in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, depart from the novel's "very minute fidelity . . . to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience." In writing a romance, Hawthorne explained, the author "may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture"; what made *The House of the Seven Gables* a romance was "the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us." All this seems germane to Sontag's purposes in *The Volcano Lover*. There may be several reasons why she has chosen to call her book a romance: first, it's set in the Romantic Era; second, she may want to set it apart from her first two novels, to signal that this time around she isn't operating under the influence of the French *nouveau roman* or trying to win a prize for most avant-garde novel of the year; third, like Hawthorne, she offers a decidedly colored version of the past, with some things emphasized and others downplayed; fourth, the book is about a romance, or rather several romances: Hamilton's romance with Emma, with his collection, and with his volcano; Emma's with Nelson; and (yes) Sontag's own long-standing romances with those two incompatible phenomena that figure significantly in these pages—high culture and populist revolution.

Presumably it is Sontag's desire to "connect a bygone time with the present" that accounts for the abundance of contemporary allusions in *The Volcano Lover*. The nar-

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rator uses words like "overachiever" and "dumbed down"; she refers to the "rain-in-Spain" lessons given Emma by the Cavaliere, notes the "strobe-like succession" of Emma's *tableaux vivants*, and labels one passage a "flash-forward." There are references to Nagasaki, Isadora Duncan, Las Vegas, and a collector in Florida who stores his acquisitions in a castle in Genoa; and we're told that suicide would be more widespread if it were made easy by the digging of a hole "at the corner of Seventieth and Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. Where the Frick Collection is. (Or a prole-ier address?)" As a rule, these deliberate anachronisms strike one as self-conscious, intrusive, and aesthetically ill-advised. Even more unattractive and bewildering are the frequent shifts between past and present tense, which sometimes occur twice within a single sentence.

One way in which Sontag contrasts the period of her novel with our own day is by discussing attitudes toward heroism, then and now. When painting heroic figures, she notes, Napoleonic-era artists sought to "preserve the larger truth of a subject from the claims of a literal, that is, inferior truth." Apostles had to be noble-looking; Alexander the Great must be tall. By contrast, we of the twentieth century

> like to stress the commonness of heroes. Essences seem undemocratic. We feel oppressed by the call to greatness. We regard an interest in glory or perfection as a sign of mental unhealthiness, and have decided that high achievers, who are called overachievers, owe their surplus of ambition to a defect in mothering (either too little or too much). We want to admire but think we have a right not to be intimidated. We dislike feeling inferior to an ideal. So, away with ideals, with essences! The only ideals allowed are healthy ones—those everyone may aspire to, or comfortably imagine oneself possessing.

These observations are valid and well worth making. Yet if Sontag mocks the modern distaste for heroes, she also scorns Nelson's heroism. After he drives the French-backed revolutionaries out of Naples, crushing their short-lived republic, his merciless punishment of the rebels—and, in particular, his insistence upon the execution of eminent poets, scholars, and scientists—makes the word "hero" sound increasingly ironic. He is, the narrator notes, "not chivalrous, high-minded, but vindictive, self-righteous. . . . Eternal shame upon the hero!" In their support of Nelson's violations of international law, the Cavaliere proves to be "not benevolent, detached, but spiritless, passive," and Emma "not merely exuberant and vulgar, but cunning, cruel, bloodthirsty. All three giving themselves over to a terrible crime."

These narratorial verdicts on the protagonists are not an isolated instance. An anecdote illustrating the queen's vindictiveness concludes: "Nothing is more hateful than revenge." A few pages later there is a lecture on mercy: "Mercy is what takes us beyond nature, beyond our natures, which are always stocked with cruel feelings. . . . Nothing is more admirable than mercy." At the close of the novel—after several brief sections consisting of the deathbed musings of the Cavaliere and of posthumous reflections by Emma, Emma's mother, and the Cavaliere's first wife, Catherine (whose romantic friendship with his rich nephew, William, presages the Emma-Nelson affair)—we are offered the posthumous testament of Eleanora Fonseca di Pimental, a poetry-writing noblewoman who was executed for her pro-revolutionary activities. Fonseca, whose status as a female literary figure and activist makes it hard not to identify her with Sontag, devotes her final pages—which are the final pages of the book—to a fierce condemnation of Nelson, of the Neapolitan royals, of Sir William Hamilton ("an upper-class dilettante. . . . Did he ever have an original thought, or subject himself to the discipline of writing a poem, or discover or invent something useful to humanity, or burn with zeal for anything except his own pleasures and the privileges annexed to his station?"), and of Emma, who she pronounces an "enthusiast" with "no genuine

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convictions. . . . I can easily imagine Emma Hamilton, had her nationality been different, as a republican heroine, who might have ended most courageously at the foot of some gallows. That is the nullity of women like her." Implicitly contrasted with Emma is Fonseca herself:

> I was earnest, I was ecstatic, I did not understand cynicism, I wanted things to be better for more than a few. I was willing to give up my privileges. I was not nostalgic about the past. I believed in the future. I sang my song and my throat was cut. I saw beauty and my eyes were put out. Perhaps I was naïve. . . . Sometimes I had to forget that I was a woman to accomplish the best of which I was capable. Or I would lie to myself about how complicated it is to be a woman. Thus do all women, including the author of this book. But I cannot forgive those who did not care about more than their own glory or well-being. They thought they were civilized. They were despicable. Damn them all.

What are we to make of these blunt verdicts by the narrator and by a character who doesn't even appear until the last few pages and connects herself explicitly with Sontag? Could these last pages be intended as Sontag's own *apologia pro vita sua*? If earlier in the novel her sympathies appear to be very much with the Cavaliere, here she manifestly wants us to identify this woman with her, which would seem to demand that we further identify the chaos of the Napoleonic wars with the tumult of the Vietnam era, revolutionary France with the Soviet Union, the Neapolitan republic with North Vietnam, and the British Empire with the United States. This is not the only place in *The Volcano Lover* in which Sontag suggests such parallels. Her reference, elsewhere in the novel, to the English military in Naples as "agents of a world empire . . . in a far-off southern satrapy rich in traditions of corruption and indolence, where they are trying to inculcate martial virtues and the necessity of resisting the opposing superpower," is an obvious jab at America's involvement in Vietnam. (Whatever one may think of the conduct of the war, to suggest in 1992 that Vietnam was a U.S. "satrapy" and the war a manifestation of American imperial ambitions is disgraceful; though Sontag did get around to condemning Communism a few years back, she would still seem to have trouble accepting that the imperial ambitions underlying the war in Vietnam were those not of America but of the Soviet Union.)

Likewise, Sontag would appear to be trying to put the best possible face on her own Vietnam-era naïveté and idealism when she has her narrator say that the Neapolitan revolution "doesn't have a chance. Indeed, it is the classic design, confected in that decade, reused many times since, for a revolution that doesn't have a chance. And will go down in history as naïve. Well-intentioned. Idealistic. Premature. The sort of revolution that gives, to some, a good name to revolution." At the end, it's hard not to read Fonseca's attack on the Hamiltons as a surrogate attack by Sontag on the artists, intellectuals, and other privileged folk who failed to mount the 1960s barricades alongside her—and as a suggestion that she is as noble as Fonseca because she gave a damn, that the only difference between her and the intellectual types who weren't taken in by the likes of Ho Chi Minh and Castro was that her colleagues were less big-hearted than she was, and that her only flaw was an excess of benevolence with which the world has yet to catch up. "You can always count," the narrator complains, "on the naïveté and gullibility of the benevolent. They go along, marching ahead, thinking they have people behind them, and then they turn around and . . . nobody there. The mob has peeled off, looking for food or wine or sex or a nap or a good brawl. The mob is unwilling to be high-minded." Could this possibly mean that when Sontag reflects upon her behavior during the Vietnam War she believes that if the American public failed to be sold on socialist revolution, it was because they weren't as capable as she is of devotion to a moral ideal?

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If so, Sontag deserves some kind of award for chutzpah. For even the remotest suggestion of a parallel between her and Fonseca is outrageous. Fonseca cares about the commonfolk; Sontag, whose *dramatis personae* doesn't include one full-bodied member of the proletariat, continues to exhibit only the most pro forma interest in and concern for the lower orders. Fonseca willingly sacrifices her comfort and security to support a republican government; Sontag, sacrificing nothing, traveled to North Vietnam and Cuba as a guest of totalitarian dictators and praised their murderous, repressive regimes while condemning American democracy. Fonseca ends up on the gallows; Sontag ended up with a MacArthur grant. Of course, one could argue that Sontag, by painting a largely sympathetic portrait of the Cavaliere, Emma, and "the hero" and then having a character attack them, means to represent her own internal conflict between, on the one hand, her own connoisseurship, her sense of identification with a creative, attractive woman, and her tendency toward hero-worship, and, on the other, her sense of obligation to feel solidarity with the masses. She has, after all, written that "[l]ike all great aesthetes, Barthes was an expert at having it both ways"; perhaps she, who surely considers herself a great aesthete, wants to have it both ways too: to assert at once the rectitude and pointlessness of populist revolution and the joy and moral equivocality of connoisseurship, creativity, and heroism, and thereby to draw our attention to the problematic nexus between ethics and aesthetics, virtue and valor, morality and epicurism. To put it differently, one could argue that Sontag embraces both the Cavaliere and Fonseca, the pre-Revolutionary and the modern, the conserver and the destroyer, the involved and the detached, the lover of beautiful things and the lover of people—that she contradicts herself, in short, because she contains multitudes.

Or perhaps we're meant to understand that Sontag is playing some kind of postmodern game here—a game with the idea of narratorial assertion, old-fashioned moralizing, authorial intrusion. This is, after all, the woman who wrote in "On Style" that a critic should not treat a work of art "as *a statement being made in the form of a work of art.*" And: "A work of art is a thing *in* the world, not just a text or commentary on the world." And: "A work of art, so far as it is a work of art, cannot—whatever the artist's personal intention—advocate anything at all." By incorporating in *The Volcano Lover* several references to the unreliability of art and the use of literature as a means of escape, Sontag would seem to be cautioning us not to read her autobiographically.

Yet even as she does this, she would also seem to be compelling us to relate the novel's closing pages to her own personal history. Perhaps the fundamental problem here is that the controlling sensibility of this book ultimately seems less that of Sontag the artist than that of Sontag the author of "commentary on the world." Instead of gently coaxing local truths out of her characters, Sontag too often thrusts upon them ready-made, generalized notions about connoisseurship, heroism, etc.; instead of seeking to comprehend the mystery of motivation—how a poor English girl ends up supporting a tyrannical monarchy and a noblewoman ends up a populist rebel—Sontag too often uses her story as an excuse to toss off axioms and air prejudices. Now, had Fonseca been a well-rounded character who figured throughout much of the novel, and about whom we knew enough to be able to believe in her devotion to rebellion and care about her fate—and had we seen enough, moreover, of Neapolitan peasant life to appreciate the reasons for that devotion—her posthumous tirade might have worked, and Sontag might have managed to engender a potent, credible, and dramatically effective tension between this woman's *Weltanschauung* and that of the Cavaliere and company. As it is, alas, Sontag's closing pages simply come off as one more instance of the lamentable self-centeredness—and, yes, the peculiarly constructed cultural elitism—with which her readers have become all too familiar.

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Samuel Johnson in his letters

by Christopher Ricks

Samuel Johnson praised with pleasure the achievements of his friends, among them Sir Joshua Reynolds. How had Reynolds given the world his gifts? "In diffusing friendship, in reviving tenderness, in quickening the affections of the absent, and continuing the presence of the dead."

Johnson's letters, which manifest those same tender powers, are no surprise in their greatness, though Johnson himself was unremittingly a surprise, not least in managing to be even more himself than anyone could have expected. His letters corroborate—rather than expand with novelty—the reasons for being grateful that he breathed. Nothing wrong with this sheer satisfaction and substantiation. "I know not any thing more pleasant or more instructive than to compare experience with expectation, or to register from time to time the difference between Idea and Reality." But in the case of this very great man, our pleasure and instruction burgeon in the confidence that the experience of him so perfectly fits the expectation—upon our registering that there is no difference between the Idea and the Reality of Johnson.

Here he is in his letters, our greatest man of letters.[1] The most acute and ample critic, the first whole-headed editor of Shakespeare, our gravest poet, the wisest and wittiest and wiliest of talkers, and (though it was left to James Murray to make the greatest dictionary) the greatest dictionary-maker. And the most humane of moralists. These days, there are those who affect to believe that there is no such thing as greatness (or rather, *past* greatness, since they have their living greats), that greatness is a factitious fiction, a male political bagatelle. They must steer clear of Johnson.

The letters bring home his diverse love. Of a new-born child, the comparison being with the already-prized brother: "I shall love him by degrees." Of his efforts to win some warmth from the wife of James Boswell: "She is a sweet lady, only she was so glad to see me go, that I have almost a mind to come again, that she may again have the same pleasure." To his dearest woman-friend, Mrs. Thrale (the rupture of their friendship was to break hearts, when in her viduity she gave her heart to Piozzi): "Do not be frighted, Trade could not be managed by these who manage it, if it had much difficulty."

It is such love which consolidates our trust in the fiercely unloving man whom Johnson set himself on occasion to be. For instance, the occasion of his quarrel with the forger of Scottish lore, the misty Ossianist Mr. Macpherson:

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1 *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, The Hyde Edition, edited by Bruce Redford. Volume I (1731-1772), 431 pages; Volume II (1773-1776), 385 pages; Volume III (1777-1781), 399 pages; Princeton University Press, $29.95 each. Two further volumes are promised for 1994.

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> Mr. James Macpherson—I received your foolish and impudent note. Whatever insult is offered me I will do my best to repel, and what I cannot do for myself the law will do for me. I will not desist from detecting what I think a cheat, from any fear of the menaces of a Ruffian.

Or there is the justly famous letter to Lord Chesterfield, the grandee who had not found it in himself to be Johnson's patron but who then, upon publication of the Dictionary, wrote a patronizing piece.

> Is not a Patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for Life in the water and when he has reached ground encumbers him with help.

A question admitting of no answer but Yes, and the more so in that Johnson did not end it with a question mark but with a full stop.

Such principled quarrels are the other side of the generous coin in which Johnson always dealt. It was handsomely to be expected, then, that some of the best letters would deal with quarrels between friends, quarrels which should never have happened but the happening of which Johnson perfectly well understood. New to me (it was a late addition to the previous edition of the letters) is the enterprising engagement with William Huggins, November 9, 1754, in which Johnson tries to reconcile his friends in full consciousness of the risks: ("I find that I am likely to suffer the common fate of intermedlers, and receive no thanks on either side"). The fracas turned upon the loan—or was it the gift?—of a watch. Johnson is affectionately stern: "if you are more affected by the provocation than the loss, and more intent on resentment than the disputed property, I have no means of pacification to offer." Lovely, that so engagingly combative a man as Johnson should exercise himself to offer pacification among friends. But then Johnson exercises discriminations too, altogether candid: "He is however a good man who in such a quarrel dos [*sic*] but one thing wrong."

Johnson, moreover, can bring these urgings home to himself. There is a superb letter to Boswell about Johnson's tiff with Dr. Percy:

> The debate between Dr. Percy and me is one of those foolish controversies which begin upon a question of which neither party cares how it is decided, and which is nevertheless continued to acrimony, by the vanity with which every man resists confutation.

Johnson is saved from abasement by his confidence that every man acts so, and saved from complacency by his admission that he too is the victim of his own folly and vanity. It is the shape which matters, as with so many of Johnson's understandings. For instance, his admonitions about misfortune:

> When any calamity is suffered, the first thing to be remembred is, how much has been escaped. The house might have been entred by Ruffians when Mrs. Salusbury had [been] in it and who can tell what horrours might have followed.

Again:

> The world is full of troubles. Mrs. Lennox has just been with me to get a Chirurgeon to her Daughter . . . who has received a kick from a horse, that has broken five fore teeth on the upper side. The world is likewise full of escapes; had the blow been a little harder it had killed her.

Had this been phrased a little harder, it would have been callous. But Johnson judged it aright.

The letters confirm that Johnson's greatness flows from the magnanimity of his reluctance. William Empson once praised an aspect of Aristotle and of Copernicus in argument: "it shows that both these great men were more intelligent (less at the mercy of their own notions)" than their twentieth-century critic "wishes to think them." This deliciously glancing gloss on intelligence, "less at the mercy of their own no-

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tions," oddly fits the assertive Johnson. There is the heartening moment in his criticism of *Paradise Lost* when, having deprecated blank verse, he pulls his argument apart and himself together:

> But, whatever be the advantage of rhyme, I cannot prevail on myself to wish that Milton had been a rhymer; for I cannot wish his work to be other than it is; yet, like other heroes, he is to be admired rather than imitated.

Yet the heroic Johnson is exactly to be imitated—and not only admired—in this inability to *prevail on himself.*

The same with his comprehension of Othello's character, where Johnson catches as no other critic has so compactly done the contrariety not only within Othello but within our responses to him: "though it will, perhaps, not be said of him as he says of himself, that he is 'a man not easily jealous', yet we cannot but pity him, when at last we find him 'perplexed in the extreme'." It is *cannot but* which effects the honorable reluctance here: "yet we cannot but pity him." For this concedes, in pain, how much there is about Othello which we loathe and are loath to pity.

Johnson's letters are alive with such locutions of probity's reluctance, *cannot but* and *prevail on myself* and suchlike. Life in both convents and palaces, Johnson writes, is

> supported with impatience, and quitted with reluctance. That it must be so soon quitted, is a powerful remedy against impatience; but what shall free us from reluctance? Those who have endeavoured to teach us to die well, have taught few to die willingly; yet I cannot but hope that a good life might end at last in a contented death.

"I cannot but hope that . . ."; "I cannot but think that . . ."; "I cannot but regret that . . ."; "I cannot help thinking that . . ."; this ubiquitous turn is not just a mannerism, it has the full force of both concession and stubbornness, as Johnson himself so fortifyingly had.

The editor of these volumes, Bruce Redford, does well to praise in particular Johnson's letters of condolence, which are among his supreme achievements. Condolence, and also commiseration upon occasions other than death. To the disappointed Mrs. Thrale (disappointed of a legacy) Johnson was able not only to offer good reasons but also to acknowledge that they were not good enough, and therefore to urge: "But even to think in the most reasonable manner, is for the present not so useful as not to think."

"I am sorry not to owe so much, but to repay so little." Gratitude for such memorable sayings is in order, not only to Dr. Johnson but to Dr. Redford. These, the first three volumes of five, have been edited with skill, acumen, and learning. Handsome in design, consistent and economical in procedures, respectful, this edition will come to replace that of R. W. Chapman forty years ago (reprinted in 1984). This new edition includes some new letters, many transcriptions made anew, and much exact annotation. It is not perfect, partly because no human achievement is. Dr. Redford must already have kicked himself a great many times for the error which has crept into the second letter, the first of those letters which a reader can check against an included facsimile: the facsimile clearly reads (as did R. W. Chapman) "If there be any occasion," which is now given wrongly as ". . . any reason." I haven't collated Redford with Chapman, but there are other occasions (not reasons) when Chapman was right and Redford is wrong. To Mrs. Thrale, August 23, 1777:

> My Master may plant and dig till his pond is an ocean, if he can find water, and his parterre adorn.

Something wrong with that last word, I felt, and when I looked up the passage in Chapman I found ". . . and his parterre a down." But neither Chapman (who knew all of English literature and sometimes assumed his readers did) nor Redford, who has a wrong reading here and anyway is a bit par-

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simonious with allusive annotation, supplies the needed note: Pope, at Timon's villa, *Epistle to Burlington* 105-6:

> To compass this, his building is a Town,
> His pond an Ocean, his parterre a Down.

As an editor, Johnson knew that notes are a necessary evil. No two editors would ever offer exactly the same annotation. So we should beware of too much supposing that editions get superseded. The *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer of this latest edition said that it "is, as one would expect, superior in several ways to R. W. Chapman's." Whiff of complacency there. Chapman was a magnificent editor, deeply and idiosyncratically learned. He had a splendid knack for indexes too, very humane, quirky, and useful. Have a look at his third volume, for instance his Index VII, "Johnson's English."

Meanwhile, admirable as Redford's edition is, we should bear in mind that there is no such thing as a definitive edition. Chapman had a rueful list, at the end of his index of authors, of "Untraced Quotations." A great many of them remain untraced in Redford. And even the text of the letters may still need scrutiny. I think that Chapman is right to read "authours," and Redford wrong ("authors"), in the letter to Richard Farmer, July 22, 1777 (see the facsimile). And I wish I could make sense of a reading upon which Chapman and Redford agree, the phrase *give pain* in the noble letter to Mrs. Thrale, April 28, 1768:

> It is indeed a great alleviation of Sickness to be nursed by a Mother, and it is a comfort in return to have the prospect of being nursed by a daughter, even at that hour when all human attention must be vain. From that social desire of being valuable to each other, which produces kindness and officiousness, it proceeds, and must proceed, that there is some pleasure in being [able] to give pain. To roll the weak eye of helpless anguish and see nothing on any side but cold indifference, will I hope happen to none whom I love or value.

Is the editor right to supply "[able]"? Did Johnson really write "to give pain" there? Not, for instance, *soothe* or *relieve* pain, or some such word?

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"Star teller"
by Donald Petersen

The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars.
—Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*

So prompt to please. No problems. No demurrals.
You're what they want—the confidential kid
Who'll handle their deposits and withdrawals
And keep his baser inclinations hid.

Greenbacks and coins fall fast as leaves, nuts, apples.
Your booth is piled thick like an orchard floor.
It grows on trees? Will you, with all your scruples,
Not fail just once and pluck from the cash drawer?

No—nervous, sedulous, and always handy,
You've curbed temptation with a steady brake.
Had not a boy who stole a piece of candy
Been dredged, still smiling, from a chocolate lake?

For fear has helped you in the fiscal arts.
Amazed, you've seen them reaching—watch their faces!—
Through purses, pockets, to their inmost parts.
Who counts their money strokes their private places.

And each night as you fall asleep you count
Down stairways, adding up your all-time totals.
Make no misstep. Count every step. Then mount
The tower of sleep reserved for blameless mortals.

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So, one, two, three, four, five, you venture down
The dark descent, though hard and rare, six, seven . . .
Ah, there's the chocolate lake and there's the town
Of those who've lost their count and can't get even.

Two weeks' vacation—reading, rest, and leisure—
Unwinding on the beach. Break loose once more
With Peg and Bill—still counting, for your pleasure,
The pebbles on the beach, one, two, three, four . . .

Peg is big sister to the world, available
To friend and beast. Clear-eyed, warm-hearted Peg.
She'll hurt no one, her virtue's unassailable.
Bill drags behind her with his crippled leg.

They've lived through boredom and domestic muddles.
Peg's always game. Bill's bluff but out of tune,
In search of shots and smokes and barroom buddies,
Touched by the weather and the changing moon.

Peg reads your horoscope. Beware, Tuesday,
Of swimming far or plunging deep. Beware,
Wednesday, of burns and cuts. Of drink, Thursday.
Of Eros, Friday, twined in nests of hair.

Bill's waking up just now—a little jumbled—
Had trouble sleeping—nipped for half the night—
I've got to go. You notice her enameled
Nails, her curls, her thonged and sandaled feet.

Till later, then? she smiles. So brief the moment.
You help her up, receive her friendly kiss.
The waves ride up the beach, hissing and foaming,
Each blindly lost in each, no end to this.

Fair day, bright waves, too fluid to be reckoned?
Each wave contains the one and many in it.
A world of particles, second by second
Crashing in spray, at sixty worlds per minute!

Your fourteen thousandth day has come and gone,
But who would count his fortune to the penny—

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Or count ten million pebbles, one by one?
The one alone, the one against the many.

What comes at last? Revolving earthbound rest,
Before the Sun's expansion and implosion?
Your particles compounded and compressed,
Waiting the reflux of the cosmic ocean?

All things descend, the many split from one,
From primal hydrogen that stoked a star . . .
Carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, calcium, iron
Helped make the molecules you strangely are.

Ages ago a bursting star bequeathed
The smoldering stuff of Earth. The power to rear it?
The godlike photosynthesis that breathed
Through slime and leaf to flesh and flickering spirit!

The god you talk to, called the god of man,
By man created, never died or vanished.
The god of nature, older far, began
Before the big bang and has never finished.

Stars die, new stars are born—by no man's choice,
By laws of nature. Man's self-regulation
Calls for man's laws. With human god we voice
Allegiance to our kin or kind or nation.

Jesus, Confucius, Buddha, Socrates,
Aquinas, Dante spoke with high afflatus . . .
And Newton, Paine, Kant, Darwin, and the leagues
Of poet-scientists that re-create us.

Let ritual, birthright, civil pomp, and title
Confer on human god divine transcendence . . .
Tunes, costumes, voices, and the whole caboodle,
With human aberrations in attendance . . .

Time, place, and spectacle. We watch and hope.
Despite the praise, the slights, the controversy,
The Sun's rays pierce the sky-blue envelope
Of Earth and green the soil with cosmic mercy.

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We wake. A long-dead priestess speaks to us
Of beauty, truth, and good, our prepossession
With children, institutions, laws, because
We seek the highest good through procreation . . .

But pregnant *in the mind*, who would not rather
Have Homer's children, Plato's, Sophocles'?
The Coptic thugs who stopped her chariot, dragged her,
Tore her in bits, but not her prophecies . . .

When she, who knew the arts and sciences,
Called for *a single science* and communion
Of cultures in one hall, her spectral eyes
Flared with the brightest light of god the human.

What split this god and spread the Earth with ills,
Made joy of others' pain, built Babel, Sodom,
Calcutta, Auschwitz, joy that jeers, hurts, kills,
Or shuts the mind in daily rounds of boredom?

Blame weakness in our genes, blame dark diseases,
Mutations, madness, blame the haywire state.
The gods that raised us haven't always pleased us.
Through them and us there runs a streak of hate.

You hate the way the ants invade the grasses
And raise their settlements on your front lawn?
You spray them out. But if those huddled masses
Were huddled people—hard to think upon?

The cosmic will, the founding god of nature,
Might find all creatures just about the same—
Expendable. But there's at least one creature
Who asks what death is, and you know its name.

This island rich in food, with oddly spaced
Antlike societies of wealth and power,
Rich with our cleverness, rich with our waste—
This is the ground on which you count this hour.

Wheeling, but not forever, on its poles,
The Sun spreads out its beauty through the distance

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From fields of furious flaring girandoles
To wake the pasture where it warms and glistens!

Round Neptune turns a moon whose loss of heat
Hugs absolute zero, frozen near four hundred.
A star in Cygnus burns, a black hole's meat,
A thousand times per second ripped and plundered.

A superstar collapses from its weight—
Manhattan in a teaspoon. Such pressed gases,
Such gravities, such fusions, such white heat—
Till squeezed down to its quarks it bursts in pieces.

Will gravity, of all the powers on high,
Prevail, close out time's fugitive adventure,
And stars and particles, collapsing, fly
Back to the core, with Capricorn and Cancer?

As when you toss in air a bunch of gravel
And watch the pieces plummet back to earth,
Will all things change their outward flight, and travel
Back to the big crunch, the big bang's rebirth?

Thus might the god of nature someday gather
His far-flung currencies and fling them back
To radiate through space almost forever,
Or take them in his pockets long and black.

And you, star teller? Scan the cosmic glitter.
Ten billion trillion stars send out their call,
Blind through the blaring void—hot chunks of nature,
Huge, uninhabitable. Count them all?

A tardy child, your parents left you early.
The looming cosmos is your land and home.
Take stock. Appraise your genes and wait to marry.
A hundred thousand make a dad or mom.

Survey your birthright. Telemetric lenses
Revolve in orbits out beyond Earth's weather,
Eyeing the deep to take the cosmic census
And weigh all things and add the weights together.

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Meanwhile above your head the Dog Star rages
In August damp, portending failures, slumps,
Catastrophes, disasters, astrophagia,
The wry dysphoria of your dog-day dumps.

Infinity once sowed the dark with seeds
(To bring, from nothing, all, from sordid nothing),
And lay in nothing's dust until with ease
He rose resplendent in his star-flocked clothing.

One ball of dust, cerulean blue wrapped round it.
One set of chances—what could come of it?
Our life? The force that blew the spark and fanned it
Could blow it back to nothing just as quick.

How chanced the Earth among such odd companions?
Who in this Bowling Alley bowld the Sun
And tricks the Earth with flowers? Who imagines
Another world more homelike than this one?

No world out there? Life overflows this Earth,
From single cells to human will. Thought-flashes
Transcend the dumps you're *in* and *of* and *with*,
By quantum leaps, sprung from the stellar ashes.

Head down, eyes closed, you scan the empyrean.
The Pleiades, the Sun and planets wheel
In one galactic spiral arm, Orion . . .
Billions of stars, but where are Peg and Bill?

Peg lies beside Bill in their darkened cabin.
What makes them one brought all the world from dust.
The sometime choirboy's fingers stroke her backbone.
I've made some lunch, Peg says, for Tom and us . . .

It's late. Six years ago on this same beach . . .
Peg and her girlfriends and that poise of hers.
You on your break, your annual retreat.
Bill, pensioned off—that leg. Those roisterers . . .

Bill and his flushed police pals. Peg and her posies,
Family, classmates, and her nursing teacher.

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You stood with them for Peg and Bill, who chose this
Compassionate arrangement of their future.

The North Star winks and wobbles. Hold your style.
Some things might stay. To future generations
Your oracles may mumble. None will fail,
Although their words are darkly framed relations.

The force that made them for the stardust children,
The force that carved these words against your death,
These latter days, was not the stellar caldron
That cooked the Earth, but human will and breath.

What made the molten stars made us—the fetus
By travail wrung, its microcosmic spark.
Plague, dearth, mischance, and tyranny dismayed us.
The life of reason in the backbone spoke.

We write the laws. Our bread is baked for Christmas
And son of man. We pierce the noosphere's
Ethereal rim with probes and praise the cosmos.
The laws of nature ring in reason's ears.

We wake to those good minds who speak to us
And question us. In mutual dependence
We find each other in the spirit. Thus
With human god we weave our earthly sentence.

Of form and reverence and storm and stress
Our tunes and voices are forever blended,
The words our words. O smile of righteousness—
The prophet from the bitter tree suspended!

From mosque and marketplace the horn is crying—
The cantor's voice, the string, the bell, the organ—
Stand up and raise your hand if you are dying.
Quick, you are dead—and buried in the bargain!

Young friend, repeat these words of him who crumbles
Inside this grave, this constellated sod,
And praise, with him who counted out these numbers,
The god of nature and the human god.

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Take thought. Approach more closely if you would—
For you have choice—and read the lines that follow,
For they might mean, if rightly understood,
Freedom from servitude, freedom from sorrow.

All things are *from* or *toward* the cosmic being,
Like dew on grass, like rivers to the sea.
And all is one. Sickness and death are fleeting.
Still there's the human singularity.

Let reason, courage, righteousness, restraint,
Let holiness and wisdom—all such virtue
As tames the brash and shapes the nurse, the saint—
Attend and keep you in each new adventure.

Bright day! Earth, air, and mind are freshly kindled.
Shells, pebbles, flowers glisten near and far.
Then go with Peg and hobbling Bill, all sandaled,
And eat your lunch beneath the nearest star.

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Letter from Prague: 1

After the Velvet Revolution

by Peter Demetz

This is the summer of discontent, the air is hot and heavy, and it is difficult to breathe in the narrow streets between the withering Renaissance palaces and the grimy *Mietskasernen* of the *fin de siècle*. Everybody wants to go to the breezy river: the waters of the Vltava are spotted with colorful little row boats, which can be rented right under the National Theater. The masses of foreign tourists, German, Austrian, and Italian, move slowly from the old Town Square, Franz Kafka on T-shirts everywhere, to the Charles Bridge (under the statues of the passionate Baroque saints, the police have begun to chase away the unlicensed vendors of Soviet war medals and army caps), and up to the castle, which is guarded by young soldiers in new uniforms reminiscent of *The Music Man*. The road of the tourists and their foreign currency is lined with little cafés (now private), which offer a Coke for forty Crowns, far above the reach of Czech citizens. In the more elegant new restaurants an evening meal, nothing to write home about, costs 800 to 1,000 Crowns, or nearly a quarter of the average monthly income of a university professor. By Friday noon, the Czechs leave the town to the tourists, German or not, and drive out to their *chaty* (weekend houses), as they have done for the last twenty years, to escape the city and the pressure of political regimentation for nearly three days of cultivating their little kitchen gardens, talking to trusted neighbors and friends, and celebrating Sunday noon with a thoroughly unhealthy meal of "Vepřo-Knedlo-Zelo" (pork-dumpling-kraut), accompanied by lots of beer. Whatever invasions or revolutions, harsh or soft, have come and gone, the weekend exodus has become an almost anthropological ritual of Czech society, and even the new private banks, so clean and efficient to look at, close on Friday at noon sharp.

The results of the quiet elections were predicted with some precision. Václav Klaus, the economist and radically reform-minded candidate of the Civic Democratic Party, won on the Czech side (with 32 percent of the vote), and Vladimir Mečiar, a former member of the Communist *nomenklatura*, of left leanings and a good deal of national pride, won in Slovakia (35 percent). Yet when the percentages were translated into terms of political power and negotiations began in Prague and Bratislava, citizens were shocked by the sudden awareness that a moment of fundamental change had been reached in the Federal Republic. The future partition of the state, although much commented on abroad, perhaps obfuscated the basic decision of the electorate to deny a mandate to the intellectuals and dissidents who had been active in building a counter-society to Communism and who had responded to the bankruptcy of the old regime with a "Velvet Revolution." The metaphor of marriage (or divorce) has been strained by nearly everybody, including the media, but it is only too true that the aging

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and childless Czech-Slovak couple awoke one morning in its gray bedroom, tired of each other and with nothing to say. Except for the historical clichés of Slav togetherness and a legitimate nostalgia for the blessings of the First Republic, neither Czechs nor Slovaks have any real idea as to why they should go on living together if they do not want to do so.

Czechs and Slovaks have been living for more than a thousand years in different historical contexts: the Czechs as a part of a Přemyslid, Luxembourg, and Hapsburg monarchy, the Slovaks in the Magyar state. T. G. Masaryk's courageous, if abstract, concept of one "Czechoslovak" nation was first undermined by the Slovak state (1938-1945), which was established under Nazi protection. Later, it was quietly abandoned in the spring of 1968 when the republic was federalized, Slovakia was declared sovereign, and the Communist regime built up a new heavy armaments industry and an extensive power base there. The little and carefully understated Prague manifesto recently signed by fourteen artists and writers exactly reflects the curious mixture of resignation, rage, and self-delusion with which Slovak events are being watched by the Czech intelligentsia. The writers feel that they cannot legitimately interfere with the Slovaks' aspiration to build their own state (as the Czechs themselves had built theirs a few generations ago). While calling for largesse in future arrangements, they insist that it should be clear that the Slovaks, not the Czechs, want to leave the present federation. Nevertheless, if the two split, citizens of Slovak origin would enjoy equal rights in the Czech lands, which should continue to be called, in a rather quixotic way, "Czechoslovakia."

Foreign observers constantly speak about these divorce proceedings. But they give far less attention to the other results of the elections: the relative strength of the Left, which came in second in the Czech lands as well as in Slovakia (giving it a slight edge in the federal parliament if that body should ever function), and the massive defeat of the "Citizens Movement," which was practically pushed out of the political scene. My friends have given me many reasons—some cynical, some pious—for these developments. After watching the almost listless election campaign, I, too, believe that the "Citizens Movement" was never entirely willing to behave in the way political parties must if they wish to survive. The movement had neglected to build organizational bases outside of Prague and seemed far more interested in erecting wooden bandstands to attract younger audiences to rock or jazz concerts than in fighting for its political ideals. "They simply have become lazy," one of my friends said.

From the beginning, the "Citizens Movement" had as many difficulties transforming itself from an invisible church into a national organization competing for power as did the opposition in the German Democratic Republic. The movement never freed itself from the old pietistic approach to politics, continuing until the end to gather its partisans into a closed circle of like-minded believers. In Czechoslovakia about 10 percent of the population carried Communist Party cards, while Charter 77, that quiet avant-garde of the "Velvet Revolution," never collected more than two thousand signatures. The mass of the nation was involved with the regime in what is called the "gray zone": even non-Party members wanted modest careers or their children admitted to the university. Now people feel uneasy about these involvements and have denied political tenure to the all-too-blameless "saints." The "gray" people are loud in praising the survivor Havel because they rightly think he is important for the image of the Republic abroad. But it is worth noting that there were only a few hundred who demonstrated their support outside parliament when he failed to be elected federal president again, not the hundred thousand who welcomed him three years ago.

In a self-lacerating article, the Moravian dissident Jan Trefulka clearly articulated the suspicion with which the people of the "gray zone" viewed the dissident purists—they

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once looked in the same way, he says, at people returning from concentration camps and Communist prisons, the exiles and the persecuted intellectuals of 1968. Those survivors were all guilty "in the eyes of those who remained silent, guilty of pride, of making sacrifices, of being innocent and knowing. . . . They were guilty by their existence, and they suddenly changed, in the eyes of the people in well-ordered apartments, into ugly insects." Trefulka's image of the insect, taken from Kafka's "Metamorphosis," has lost nothing of its rich meaning.

Yet there is still other unfinished business between the people of the "gray zone," the "saints," and the former members of the state police who destroyed lives and careers. This is the thoroughly legitimate business of "decommunization." Havel and his many advisors would have done better to push through the writing of a new constitution immediately in order to crystallize the humane aspiration of the "Velvet Revolution." As it is, the issue of the "lustration" (as it is called in Latin-educated Czech) of the judiciary, the police, and other institutions has been manipulated by various interest groups: a classic example of thieves crying thief. It is clear that the problem had been very much on Havel's mind. Although in his first euphoria he had hoped that citizens of the new society would not be "like them," he later suggested to parliament that the abstract law should be rewritten in specific detail. More recently, he had to admit to himself that he had grievously underrated the cunning tenacity of the old *nomenklatura* brotherhoods, which simply refused to melt into thin air. There is also the list of 142,000 alleged police informers, voluntary or forced, which he originally wanted to shut away in a vault; now, through recurrent leaks, it is available for sale to anyone on the street corner.

Yet the history of the Communist dictatorship does not begin in 1968, and the reform Communists of that year and their allies among the liberal intelligentsia in the West have a memory shorter than that of the victims and exiles of 1948 when Masaryk's democracy was destroyed. These old people, still alive in Prague and elsewhere, cannot easily forget that in the Fifties 178 citizens were executed, nearly 100,000 put on trial, and 27,000 transferred to forced labor camps, without legal resources or public protest. Memory spans differ; many politically interested American college graduates probably remember the movie *L'Aveu* (*The Confession*, 1970), in which Costa-Gavras showed the vicissitudes of Arthur London, a high-ranking Communist in the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Portraits of loyal Stalinists being harassed by other loyal Stalinists after a change of Party line were always heady stuff for the Left intelligentsia; yet I have yet to see a movie or perhaps a book by a feminist writer about the life and death of Milada Horáková, the national-liberal member of the Czechoslovak parliament and chairwoman of the Women's Federation who was first sent to a concentration camp by the Nazis and then, after a hysterical Communist show trial, hanged.

Everyone in the world of books, even the staunch new reformists, has been unhappy with the disappearance of state support, guaranteed contracts for translators, and the elite prerogatives for writers who were eating subsidized meals at their club and spending their days of writer's block at the Dobříš Castle. (The original owner, Count Colloredo-Mansfeld, recently visited from Vienna and praised the government for keeping the old roof intact.) Most publishing houses have gone to look for "patrons" to pay for the production of particular books. Many fly-by-night operators quickly produce a do-it-yourself or pornographic volume, take their cut, and disappear from the literary scene, investing their profits somewhere else. The prices of books are rapidly increasing, but few avid readers will deplore the passing away of the state-owned bookstores, which were run like U.S. supermarkets. On entering, you took a little wire basket, picked a few of the available volumes, and then headed to the fish-eyed, in-

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different clerk, whose only function in life was to write a sales slip. Books are now being sold on stands along the streets, but private bookshops like Fišer's (near Kafka's birthplace and the Faculty of Philosophy), where they know the difference between Kundera (Milan) the novelist and Kundera (Ludvík) the poet, are as yet very rare. The poems of seventy-two-year-old Emil Juliš, a poet's poet who long ago had been pushed into silence, are again available, as are the most important *Samizdat* volumes and the work of authors who had only been published abroad previously, like Ludvík Vaculík, Eva Kantůrková, and Eda Kriseová (whose novels, incidentally, are much better than her biography of Havel).

Among the new publications, *The Czechs in Their Modern History* by "Podven" has been much discussed. Podven, the legendary servant of Saint Wenceslas, is a collective pseudonym for the distinguished literary trinity of Milan Otáhal, a historian who lost his job after 1968, Petr Příhoda, a Catholic psychoanalyst and one of the most clear-eyed observers of the present moment, and Petr Pithart, a "liberal conservative," as he describes himself, who until recently was chief of government of the Czech republic. Written over the course of thirteen years, mostly at night, when Communism was in its decline, it is a splendid book, miraculously fusing the three different voices into a critical view of the achievements and failures of the Czech tradition. The three argue against the petit bourgeois attitude of an exclusive Czech (anti-German) nationalism based on the principle of language (as suggested by the eighteenth-century *German* philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder). They restore to his proper importance the Prague philosopher Bernard Bolzano (who was persecuted by the Metternich police) and his principles of a patriotism of shared aims, regardless of language. T. G. Masaryk again emerges as a guiding but not necessarily legendary figure; the three agree that his best writings are the polemical essays of the *fin de siècle*, but they are totally unwilling to forgive his insistence on appointing Eduard Beneš his successor, a shrewd diplomat but not a man of action in difficult times (as Havel's recent resignation shows, nobody wants to be another Beneš again).

Among the well-known writers who went into exile after 1968, Josef Skvorecký found sympathy more easily than did the internationally famous Milan Kundera, who got pretty bad press in Prague. Skvorecký, jazz musician, professor of English at Toronto University (now retired), publisher, and writer of linguistic inventiveness not fully grasped or appreciated by his American readers, came for long visits and was decorated by the president. He smiled on TV, while young and old alike enjoyed the *The Tank Battalion*, an immensely popular new movie based on his melancholy and satirical narrative about his service in the Communist army. On the evening of the première he was delivered to the cinema by helicopter.

Milan Kundera's works are being published, in sequence, by Atlantis in his hometown of Brno. He is rumored to have recently visited his old haunts without much ado, but, considering the many events happening and the importance and swagger of his speeches and essays before and immediately after 1968, he maintains an eerie silence. Kundera's relationship to his fellow-writer Havel (who, without a Party card, slipped into literature through the back door) may have its own ambivalence; Professor Kundera wanted to help the young man, son of the grand bourgeoisie, be admitted to the university. But when the Red Allies moved in, the two did not necessarily see eye to eye. In a famous essay, Kundera deplored the "fate" of the Czech nation in the shadows of the superpowers. Havel answered that Czech history was not a question of "fate" but of individual responsibility for what every citizen did and did not do; Kundera in turn responded that Havel was "an outsider" and charged that his moral attitude had long changed into "exhibitionism." The critic Vladimír Pistorius, who recently reviewed Czech literature since 1968 in a little book, likes, as many readers do, Kundera's early novel *The Joke* and his drama-

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tization of Diderot. But he dislikes "his grotesque fusion of politics and sex"—which is perhaps the secret of his international success—and feels disturbed by Kundera's alienation from the Czech reader, which is shown by his simplified vocabulary and syntax and by characters that are "lifeless paper shadows." A real discussion of Kundera, political or literary, has not yet begun.

It is a question whether all this matters to a reading public that is more amorphous than ever. The suspicion is growing among the writers that readers do not listen to them as eagerly and as respectfully as they did when the state police was the ultimate arbiter in literary matters. In the regions of Germany once dominated by Party dictatorship, such questions have long been answered in the negative. Immediately after the Fall of the Wall, East German dissidents were in the advance battalion of change (Christa Wolf and Stefan Heym dreaming, belatedly, of a German socialism with a human face), but were, within three or four weeks, swept away by an electorate that was less dreamy about what the new life was to be.

In the Czech lands, the long Indian summer of the continued public role of writers and intellectuals, which is only now ending, has made it appear that German developments were an aberration rather than a precise anticipation of what was coming elsewhere. German and Czech writers, after all, have traditionally had much in common because in their countries language and literature created the nation long before a modern state was established. Moreover, cultural history itself guaranteed to the writer, especially one of expansive patriotic gestures, a place of importance and, often, undeserved pre-eminence. There are reasons why the weekly columns by the Czech philosopher Václav Bělohradský, an ally of the American philosopher Richard Rorty, provoked readers with his disrespect for the one of the holiest cows of Czech tradition. He asserted that the time of grand truth, national or universal, had gone forever in postmodern times and that authors who claim to speak for their nations, rather than for themselves, were but late disciples of a highly dubitable German "titanism" and the idealist tradition. Even in *Literární Noviny*, the most important intellectual weekly, where many of the older writers of 1968 continue to publish, Přemysl Rut recently remarked that only madmen would want to speak for the consciousness of an entire nation. The demands that were made upon a substitute literature twenty-two years ago are now being fully met by parliaments, the press, travel, and enterprise.

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Letter from Prague: II

The hangman's tale

by Harriet Crawley

At long last the ex-Communist world confronts its past. For countries that have so recently cast off their Marxist-Leninist skin the shock waves are tidal: Russia, for example, was stunned when Gorbachev accepted Soviet responsibility for the Katyn murders in which fifteen thousand Polish officers were butchered and thrown into a mass grave. For over forty years this atrocity had been conveniently laid at Germany's door.

Now the spotlight is on Czechoslovakia, soon to separate into the "Czech Lands" and Slovakia, a division which has not existed since 1939, when the country split into the independent state of Slovakia and the Hitler-created Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

In June of this year, the Czechs were traumatized by the television broadcast of a film titled *SS-3: The Assassination of Reinhard Heydrich*, a documentary made by Czech-born director Jan Kaplan and his Polish wife, Krystyna. It contains archive footage never seen before of 250 thousand Czechs at a mass rally in Wenceslas Square singing their national anthem and raising their hands in the Hitler salute.

This public unearthing of a painful, long-buried memory has been met with shock, anger, and also with disdain. The drama-documentary has been rejected by the Karlovy Vary film festival as "unsuitable" because it is not "forward-looking." The archivist who provided the offending footage, one Mr. Caslavsky, has received death threats. And when, a week before the telecast, Jan and Krystyna Kaplan gave a private showing of their film at the Polish Cultural Institute in Prague, the evening ended in uproar. Many Czechs were outraged by what they considered a deeply "unpatriotic" film. Jan retaliated: "If you cannot face the past how can you build a future?" Staunch support came from journalists (the film was widely and favorably reviewed) and from the Czech writer Bohumil Hrabal, who rose to his feet and said: "There are no questions to ask about this film, there are only answers. I think we should go home and cry."

Jan Kaplan did not set out to make a controversial film. On the contrary, his aim was to honor his countrymen who had taken part in Czechoslovakia's spectacular act of resistance against Nazi terror: the assassination of Hitler's golden boy, Reinhard Heydrich. It was, as Krystyna Kaplan has often pointed out, the country's one moment of glory during the Occupation.

The film was planned in the Kaplans' fifth-floor flat in Kentish Town overlooking the gray slate roofs and chimney pots of Dickensian North London. They have lived in England all their adult lives, since the Prague Spring of 1968 when as students they fled. Krystyna has superb Polish looks—flaming red hair and delicate features—while Jan is a six-foot-three, soft-spoken, witty Czech who periodically gives up chain smoking and beer. They are a well-known film-

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making team with a strong track record of prize-winning documentaries for both the BBC and ITV, but this was their first independent production. They financed the film themselves in order to retain complete editorial control. Timing was important: the obvious date for the film was 1992, the fiftieth anniversary of Heydrich's assassination.

It is a "drama documentary," 90 percent archive footage and photographs, 10 percent reconstruction, with actors re-creating the assassination itself. The commentary is written by Dr. Cullum MacDonald, lecturer in Modern History at Warwick University and an authority on the Second World War.

The story is a chilling one: Reinhard Heydrich was part of Hitler's inner sanctum, tipped by many people as the Führer's successor. He was Himmler's deputy, head of the secret service apparatus including the Gestapo, and an eager advocate of the "final solution," Hitler's demonic plan to send eleven million Jews to the gas chambers.

According to Dr. MacDonald, Heydrich was "the most intelligent of the Nazis. . . . He spoke several languages, was a concert-standard violinist. He was a brilliant administrator, he was brave (as a Luftwaffe pilot he had been shot down on the Russian front), and he was as ruthless as he was amoral."

Heydrich came to Prague in September 1941 and immediately established a reign of terror. Within a year over five thousand Czechs had been either executed or sent to concentration camps. Nicknamed "The Hangman of Prague," Heydrich drove around in an open Mercedes with the cherished license plate "SS-3." He crushed all resistance and rewarded all collaboration. The Czech work force was cowed into submission and worked on round-the-clock shifts in the Skoda works and other factories to produce armaments for the German war machine.

The president, Emil Hácha, urged the nation to cooperate, and there is chilling footage of Hácha inside Prague Castle handing Heydrich the keys to the treasure chamber containing the Crown of Saint Wenceslas.

Meanwhile, in Britain, ex-President Beneš of Czechoslovakia was plotting a spectacular act of resistance that would put his country back on the map. Beneš knew that the world had written off his country; in 1938, at the Munich agreement; the borders had been redrawn wholly in Germany's favor, and in 1939 Hitler had engineered a split: Slovakia was a vassal "sovereign" state while the industrial heartland became the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia under German occupation. It was clear to Beneš that in order to regain both the sympathy and the support of the allies the Czechs must prove their commitment to the allied cause, whatever the cost. Heydrich must be assassinated.

The plan was devised in London at the Porchester Gate Headquarters of the Czech and Slovak Military Intelligence with the assistance of Churchill's Special Operations Executive and was carried out by a Moravian and a Slovak, Jozef Gabcik and Jan Kubis, two of the three thousand exiled Czechoslovak soldiers stationed in Britain during the war. In December 1941 they were parachuted into the Protectorate and spent months hiding in "safe houses" while planning the attack.

On May 27, 1942, Gabcik and Kubis ambushed Heydrich as he sat in the passenger seat of his open Mercedes, driven by his aide-de-camp. At the critical moment Gabcik's machine gun jammed but a bomb thrown by Kubis sent a small piece of shrapnel into Heydrich's spleen. Nine days later, on June 4, he died in the hospital from blood poisoning, the only top Nazi ever to be successfully assassinated.

Extraordinary archive footage shows Heydrich's coffin being carried through the deserted streets of Prague by night, the road lined with SS men holding lighted torches; it is a scene of Wagnerian ghoulishness.

Meanwhile Gabcik and Kubis were hidden in the crypt of the Saint Cyril and Methodious Church by the Czech Orthodox Bishop Gorazd and his co-workers, men of extraordinary courage who gave sanctuary not only to the assassins but also to five other parachutists who had been dropped by the RAF into the Protectorate on secret mis-

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sions. In their damp and dark surroundings the men waited while plans were made to smuggle them out of the city.

Reprisals were horrific. Hitler decided that one out of every ten citizens would be shot until the assassins were found. The village of Lidice, which had tenuous links with the RAF, was razed to the ground and its 199 male inhabitants shot while its women and children were taken away to a concentration camp. Death lists of those killed for supposedly concealing information were published daily.

The SS was getting nowhere. The courage of the Czech people was remarkable: women who had been beaten and were on the point of being shot said to their SS executioners: "We are proud to die for our country." It looked as if the assassins had got away with it, until June 16, when Sergeant Karel Curda walked into the Gestapo Headquarters in the Petchek Palace in Prague.

This was the Great Betrayal. Curda was a parachutist who, with his comrades, had been dropped by the British into the Protectorate. Instead of coming to Prague he had taken refuge in his mother's house in Southern Bohemia. By radio he monitored the bloody aftermath of Heydrich's assassination and he was terrified. He listened to the SS announcement that anyone who came forward with information before June 18 would not be harmed, and neither would his family. The reward was twenty million Deutschmarks. He boarded a train for Prague.

Although Curda did not know exactly where the parachutists were hiding, he did know the names of several "safe houses." One of these was the home of Mrs. Moravcova, whose son was in the RAF. As the Gestapo burst into her flat she swallowed a suicide pill. Her youngest son, seventeen-year-old Ata, was horribly tortured; eventually he and others talked.

Next morning the SS surrounded the church. Three of the parachutists waged a gun battle from the choir loft. Hopelessly outnumbered, they shot themselves, leaving Gabcik and three other parachutists hiding inside the sealed crypt. From the street the Czech fire brigade pumped water through a narrow opening in an attempt to force the men to surrender. It was only a matter of time before the crypt would be flooded. Four shots rang out. Heydrich's assassin, Jan Kubis, died of his wounds on the way to the hospital. Not one parachutist was taken alive.

The killing did not stop here. Curda not only betrayed his friends, he also gave the names of all those who had helped the parachutists. Their houses were raided and whole families were tortured and killed. It's estimated that in the wake of this one assassination five thousand Czechs lost their lives.

By July the country was so terrorized that Czechs trooped in thousands to the mass rally in Wenceslas Square to mark the end of martial law. Suddenly people were asked to swear loyalty to the Third Reich. To the strains of the Czech national anthem, this demoralized nation gave the Hitler salute.

When the Kaplans' film was first shown on Czech television on June 14, the station's switchboard was jammed for twelve hours. By popular demand the film was shown again that same week. Jan and Krystyna were not surprised. As Krystyna says, "For forty years the Czechs have been starved of historical truth. . . . The official Communist line has been to ignore the assassination altogether and perpetrate the myth that only Communists opposed the Fascists. . . . We tell the full story, undistorted."

Jan Kaplan went to Prague for the television debut, reluctantly, since he was dreading another round of insults and confrontation, but this time he met with quite a different reaction; instead of angry barracking there was a passionate curiosity and a determination to face the facts.

Jan attributes this in part to a remarkable radio address delivered two weeks earlier, on May 31, by Václav Havel. It was the first time a Czech president had publicly honored the men who killed Heydrich. Havel said:

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> We all know how much the assassination has cost us. Freedom *does* cost a great deal . . . for various reasons we did not resist with an organized or military force, so we had to pay in another way. . . . It was one of the most significant acts of resistance on a European scale, it was an act which significantly influenced the recognition of our exiled government, and, as a result, we emerged from the war victorious and not defeated. . . . If we are well and free we owe this to the boys who took part in the operation and the victims of the bloody aftermath, the cost we paid for the assassination.

Even so, there are those in Prague who feel the assassination was not worth it. Jan Kaplan was in a Prague pub a few weeks ago discussing the heroism of Kubis and Gabcik when a man in the corner said quietly, "In the reprisals my father was shot. . . . He was innocent, he had done nothing."

The Kaplans are distributing the film themselves. It was chosen by the Imperial War Museum to open an exhibition on the assassination of Heydrich which runs through September, and the museum is selling the video. But television is the main target and so far the film has been sold to ten countries. On June 4 it was shown in Britain on BBC 2 to enormous critical acclaim. "A riveting documentary," said *The Sunday Telegraph*. "Terrifically good," said Michael Ignatieff in *The Observer*. It has been bought by PBS for broadcast in the United States later this year.

The fact that Czechoslovakia showed the film twice in the same week does the country credit. Confronting the past is never easy, and it's not only the ex-Communist countries which have been "economic" with the truth. Until the making of the television documentary *Le Chagrin et la Pitié*, France in all its "gloire" had national amnesia about its role during the Second World War and even now it is almost impossible to have a rational conversation on the subject. The membership of the Resistance (which numbered only about four thousand people) is grossly exaggerated and the French are still acutely sensitive about Vichy and their widespread collaboration during the Second World War.

The British have faced up to many unpleasant facts: the carpet bombing of Dresden, in which thirty-five thousand civilians were killed, and the repatriation of the Cossacks, most of whom were then murdered by the Soviets or sent to Siberian Gulags.

However, records relating to the Channel Islands are still under wraps, closed until the beginning of the next century. According to Dr. Cullum MacDonald, many inhabitants of the Channel Islands (which were overrun by the Germans) collaborated with the Nazis during the war. No doubt this information would be painful and embarrassing to those still living, but it hardly justifies a cover-up. Only the most sanctimonious of prigs would not sympathize with some degree of compliance under SS terror. As Dr. MacDonald says: "Resistance against the Nazis was a minority activity in every occupied country."

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Theater

On the superiority of European methods

by Donald Lyons

One of the unexamined dogmas of cultural discourse is the moral superiority of governmental arts subsidies. Recently in *The New York Times* John Rockwell reported on the powerful Berlin culture czar, Ulrich Roloff-Momin, whose agency will this year disburse some $600 million. This tidy sum, we are told, will free "arts institutions from the need to court the broadest popularity or to spend time beseeching corporations and foundations and wealthy (and often conservative) individuals for support." Beseeching Herr Roloff-Momin is, of course, no waste of time. And what a healthy contrast to the United States, where "governmental arts support is often paralyzed by political controversy." How much more high-minded is the management of these things in Europe, where, "given centuries-old traditions of monarchical underwriting of the arts, overt political interference is more muted. Still, political pressure manifests itself in subtler ways. Mr. Roloff-Momin tries to minimize politics by remaining unaffiliated with a political party, although he adds quickly that he is ideologically close to the Socialists." Mr. Rockwell, who is an intelligent critic and an energetic seeker after the new, seems actually to be saying here that royal patronage of the arts was easy-going and permissive (something like the NEA as Governor Clinton promises to "restore" it). I wonder if Molière, Mozart, Lope de Vega, or Pushkin would agree. But this supposed alliance of omnipotence and impartiality is at once revealed to be a shotgun marriage as the czar "quickly" lets slip his allegiance. Mr. Rockwell thus undermines his own argument for the superiority of apolitical government munificence over reliance on "often conservative" private support or, still worse perhaps, "the broadest popularity." My point here is that all three legs of the arts tripod—market, private support, tax monies—are necessary, but that none is per se more moral. A disinterested love of excellence, far from being the exclusive property of those whose disburse tax funds, must be fought for in such councils as strenuously as elsewhere, especially in times when the very notion of excellence is "under erasure."

In the theater, hunger for public money likes to wrap itself in the banner of "repertory theater," so much purer, it is assumed, than the commercial variety. Another *New York Times* writer, David Richards, recently explained the matter thus: "It is enormously costly to keep whole casts and sets at the ready so they can be changed every few nights. While that is the practice at all the great theaters of the world—from the Comédie Française to the Royal National Theater of Britain—it is one we have never been able to implement for long in this country before the money runs out. Without healthy subsidies, it's no go, and we're all aware of the current state of governmental largesse."

Let us look at a recent offering of the Comédie Française, which, under the new

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regime of Jacques Lassalle, brought Anatoli Vassiliev, who does not know French, from Saint Petersburg to Paris to direct a rare mounting of Mikhail Lermontov's play *Bal masqué*, which the Russian poet wrote in 1835 when he was twenty-one. In those unpermissively monarchical times, the Czarist censors quashed the play for being too critical of "society." *Bal masqué* is a melodrama of misunderstanding and jealousy very characteristic of the period and very much in the spirit of Pushkin. Nina, a faithful wife, loses a bracelet at a masked ball. Arbenin, her husband, is made, by a conniving Baroness who has found the bracelet, to suspect Nina of having deceived him with a Prince. Arbenin poisons Nina at the next ball, is challenged to a duel by the Prince whom he has accused of cheating at cards, and goes mad. It is a youthful and humorless piece, more libretto than play, worth reviving perhaps but needing delicacy and spirit in approach. What it got was a Robert Wilson-esque stylized distortion that earned the worst reviews in years, sold few tickets, and emptied the houses that came. At the opening ball, for instance, women danced spastically by themselves between strips of black cloth. It looked like a ball in an asylum. The Baroness sought to register seductive malevolence by growling, snarling, and spitting. The husband sat in a wheelchair. A dwarf put a sparkler up the hostess's gown. Back home, the husband brooded sourly and at length; his concerned wife knelt silently at his wheel for a full three minutes. Then she squatted upstage, whining, "Je suis innocente." The husband limped off, with agonized and agonizing slowness, on crutches, muttering, "Les femmes!" At ball No. 2, Nina swigged the poison, slumped in a chair, and asked her husband how long she had to live. When he answered, "Un long quart d'heure encore," the few remaining members of the audience laughed in sympathy. The verse translation, by André Markowicz, whose versions of Dostoevsky have been praised, lurched tonelessly between a banal epigrammaticism ("Le bonheur est un traitre") and a forced hysteria ("Moi trahir pour le baiser d'un imbecile!"). Lermontov's registers were coarsened. Indeed, the whole production was a contemptuous trivialization of Lermontov and a parade of selfish and derivative gimmickry. While the repellent inhumanity of the evening can, of course, be paralleled throughout Eurotheater and on these shores, it was especially depressing to see newly free Russian artists trashing their own heritage in pursuit of the chimera of international "chic."

The production boded ill for the new Comédie Française regime of Jacques Lassalle, creature doubtless of Minister of Culture Jack Lang, admiringly described by Mr. Rockwell as "the world's foremost cultural politician." I hope it will please M. Lang, who loves to bring culture to the impecunious masses, to hear that I was, early on, able to move unmolested from my twenty-franc perch up by the scrolled ceiling down to the understandably untenanted but opulent orchestra.

The Royal National Theatre was able to give a somewhat better account of its subventioned self in the production I saw of Alan Bennett's *The Madness of George III*, although it might be argued that a less elaborate and "repertory" staging and a denser script might have made better theater.

Alan Bennett has always had a merry way with royals and nobles. He started out in the theater, as did Jonathan Miller, Peter Cook, and Dudley Moore, as one of the creators and stars of *Beyond the Fringe*, which after some thirty years remains the cream of satirical revues. The ceremonially pompous RADA style of doing Shakespeare, then dominant, was never the same (or should never have been the same) after their foppish prancing: "Sussex, get thee to Essex. Essex, get thee to Sussex" . . . "O saucy Worcester." Mr. Bennett is now a playwright of some note, specializing in monologues about lonely, mad souls on the one hand and, on the perhaps not illogical other hand, in plays about royals. In 1988 the RNT staged his short *A Question of Attribution*, which features Queen Elizabeth II enigmatically chatting

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about fraud with Anthony Blunt, Keeper of her pictures, scholar, and traitor. The talk is, nominally, about art fakes—how to detect them and whether or not they do any real harm—but a chill undercurrent possibly runs beneath the smooth surface of the royal commonplaces. It is a gem of ambiguity.

George III, beside losing the colonies (they became his King Charles's head), was, as the present Prince of Wales has been eager to establish, an accomplished and attractive man. In 1788 his royal eccentricities began to turn to outright madness, and it is then the play opens. Its successful scenes involve the Royal Family: chatterbox King; plumply domestic and devoted Queen (they cuddle in bed, calling each other "Mr. King" and "Mrs. Queen"); and the grotesque and dandified Prince of Wales, toward whom the usual Hanoverian antipathy of father to son reaches homicidal intensity (the King tries to strangle him). The preposterous Prinny, Prince of Wales, has the best lines: when a madwoman's knife merely cuts the King's waistcoat, he declares that mishap to be almost as "vexing" as assassination. Prinny is a dim descendant of Algernon Moncrieff.

Surrounding the mad King and the ambitious Prince are interested politicians: the ins (Prime Minister Pitt and his party) want to hush up the madness; the outs (Fox and his party) want the King declared mad and a Regency installed. Each side employs corrupt doctors, who are, in time-honored theatrical tradition, nothing but sycophantic and venal ignoramuses ("With any patient I undertake a physical examination only as a last resort; it is an intolerable intrusion on a gentleman's privacy. With His Majesty it is unthinkable").

Bennett writes these pols and docs on one note; once put on stage, they wrangle all too predictably. He has no Shavian knack for dramatizing ideas, or, better to describe what Shaw does, to play and toy articulately with ideas. And the RNT does not help with its penchant, here in the large Lyttleton space, for ceremonious scenes; a chamber piece in the small Cottesloe would have brought out the best in Bennett.

As the doctors quibble about the exact name to affix to the royal mania (is it "flying gout" or "rheumatism in the head"?), the King declines into incoherence and incontinence. At this point appears one of Bennett's two medici ex machina—a dour, black-clad clergyman called Francis Willis who runs in remote Lincolnshire an enlightened madhouse where he treats his patients with reason, fresh air, and kindness. He is, in fact, a representative of the best of eighteenth-century civilization, the civilization of Samuel Johnson, who himself respected George III. But Willis, who was impressively played by Charles Kay, has a darker, tougher side to his therapy as well: as George howls scatologically, Willis orders him strapped to a "restraining chair," a contraption resembling an electric chair. Handel's *Coronation Hymn* swells as George screams: "I am the King of England." "No, sir," answers Willis with icy and undeferential calm, "you are the patient." It makes an effective first-act curtain.

In the next act Willis battles the snobbery of the metropolitan medical establishment and "cures" the patient by a regime of systematic humiliation and punishment/reward (as theater it owed something to the taming of Helen Keller by Annie Sullivan in *The Miracle Worker*). At last, the King is made to kneel before a page he has struck and to beg forgiveness; the moving moment is re-enforced when the recovered King reads from *King Lear* at home in Windsor and recognizes himself in the sad, mad monarch. Nigel Hawthorne's truly Lear-like largeness of suffering is powerful here; this is a man who has purged himself of both the follies of madness and the pride of kingship and has become lovable. Bennett does not quite earn the injection of Lear here (not to mention the snippets of *Richard II* and *Henry IV* injected elsewhere); they are borrowed feathers. There remains a final necessity for the King to swallow his last distaste and publicly embrace his wastrel and frivolous son. He brings himself to do it on the grounds that "we must be a model family to the nation" (this got a huge laugh in the

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summer of 1992, an uneasy time for some of George III's descendents). Bennett gets a few final laughs at the expense of Pitt, who assures the King that the recent disturbances at the Bastille will come to nothing. And then there is the last banana peel: a modern doctor steps forward in white to explain that the King was suffering not from a psychological disturbance at all, but from a chemical imbalance called porphyria. A clue was at hand all the time in the King's purple urine, but it was illegible to eighteenth-century science. The physicians scoffed at its importance, while it fascinated the servants, who delighted in puns about "piss the younger" and "piss the elder." The modern doctor thinks all Willis's efforts as much a waste of time as the stool-gazing of the fashionable physicians, and we are left in some uncertainty as to what extent this is Bennett's voice, too. In one sense, it cannot be, for the play's two heroic portraits—the poor King and the stern doctor—survive the final cynicism, but it seems rather Bennett than history that cannot make up its mind. Bennett's talent is that of a miniaturist—epyllion rather than epic—and the epic scale of this RNT production has not served that talent well.

If Bennett is not Shaw, Shaw *is*, at least in such a lucid and amusing production of *Heartbreak House* as Trevor Nunn directed at the Haymarket in London this summer. Shaw's 1919 play, occasioned by the war and worked on anxiously throughout it, was dubbed by him "a fantasia in the Russian manner on English themes"; but Chekhovian notes of pain and longing and resignation are, in the last analysis, unsoundable by Shaw. *Heartbreak House* is rather a crazy and uneven but splendid mixture of allegory and Restoration comedy, an apocalyptic brew of *Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Way of the World*. The play ends with old England (the England of "money"—in one evil word) blown to bits by bombs; in its place is proposed a sort of new England, as personified by an idealistic young woman hungry for "life with a blessing" and a crusty old sea-captain who has passed beyond desire and a clever social ironist and a philosophic rake, all wildly eager for more destruction. It is an exasperating play in which Shaw barely bothers to dramatize old obsessions (the sexless marriage) and familiar figures (the burglar who is no burglar but a master of paradox) but it has a strange life and energy that a sympathetic production can tap. Trevor Nunn gives the play sex, as Ginger Rogers was said to do for Fred Astaire (no need to add that Shaw gives Mr. Nunn, who has done a lot of Andrew Lloyd Webber, class, as Fred was said to do for Ginger). The first-act set is a huge greenhouse full of sun and glass and the chirp of birds; it is shaped like a prow (nautical imagery runs throughout). To it comes Ellie, a besotted maiden, played with enormous charm by Imogen Stubbs. Her education in the deceiving ways of Men—specifically, Hector Hushabye, well played by Daniel Massey—is promptly undertaken by Hesione Hushabye, the dreamboat's ironic and amused wife. Hesione's intelligence and irony, *become* the drama, in the dazzlingly playful, erotically kinetic Vanessa Redgrave. At once wise educator, wanton seductress, and witty dramaturge, she shimmies, rolls on the floor, and then sits perfectly still to concentrate on a heart-to-heart with Ellie while facing upstage. She dryly underplays the finding of her husband in the arms of her sister; knowing men and the world and money for what they are, she yet loves to dance. She did more, though, than give a hypnotic performance; in a vein of young-Katherine-Hepburn freshness (so different from her mannered Mrs. Wilcox in the current, overupholstered film of E. M. Forster's *Howards End*), Redgrave restores Hesione Hushabye to the gallery of Shaw's most vital women—which means, of course, his most vital people. Paul Scofield's blustery Shotover is kept in a dour and sour key, not begging for the senile lovability Rex Harrison so skillfully solicited in the role in New York a while back. On reflection, Scofield's Calvinist (so to speak) Shotover is better and truer to the play, in its frightening misan-

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thropy—well accentuated by Nunn's slam-bang aerial Armageddon at the end.

An exciting revival at a commercial theater and a flawed new play at a subsidized theater prove nothing, of course, but the shakiness of such preconceived notions as that tax monies and repertory structures in themselves tend to guarantee healthy art. It is tempting, but would be just as absurd, to argue that subsidization and repertory confirm second-raters in habits of stylistic laziness and moral emptiness.

In the *Times*, Mr. Richards was spurred to his defense of repertory theater by the curiosity of Al Pacino's appearing at the Circle in the Square on alternating nights in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* and in a trivial contemporary play. This sequence Mr. Richards called "repertory theater." If it was, then so much the worse for that tarnished piety. Al Pacino as Herod carried on like one of those mad, berouged, and begowned Roman emperors in biblical movies. But just as in those films one had to suffer through long stretches of Hollywood religiosity between the orgies and imperial tantrums, here one must crawl across deserts of paste prose. Wilde had been impressed by the Decadent verbosities that Flaubert and Mallarmé had brought to their respective treatments of this story, and wrote *Salomé*, in French, in Paris in 1891. The interfering Lord Chamberlain, relying on the old Puritan ban on dramatizing the Bible, refused Sarah Bernhardt a license to do it in London in 1892. The anonymous English version, credited to Lord Alfred Douglas, is perhaps by Wilde, although one would prefer to assign its absurd aridities to Douglas. The thing is written in an insincere and inept blend of Swinburne and the Song of Solomon. Here, for example, is the smitten Salome addressing Jokanaan (a.k.a. John the Baptist): "Thy body is white like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows that lie on the mountains, like the snows that lie on the mountains of Judaea, and come down into the valleys." Later, rebuffed by the holy man, she changes her mind but not her metronomically boring tune: "Thy body is hideous. It is like the body of a leper. It is like a plastered wall where vipers have crawled; like a plastered wall where the scorpions have made their nest. It is like a whitened sepulchre full of loathsome things."

The Strauss-less *Salomé* is junk, and was not made palatable at the Circle in the Square by either the neo-hootchy-kootchy seven-veils choreography of Lar Lubovich or the desperately madcap histrionics of Al Pacino. Better to have rented *The Robe* instead.

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Art

Through a blighted landscape

by Jed Perl

The 1991-92 season in the New York galleries was a very strange time, a time when many artists had one-person shows full of impressive, engaging work, and yet each one of those shows had to be experienced as an isolated, autonomous event, an event that was unrelated to any other event and to anything that might be called a community of values or concerns. Individual artists were pushing their work pretty hard, pretty far, and I cannot be unhappy with a season that brought so much interesting work to the fore. Things are far from all bad when a single season brings us an installation by Guilio Paolini and shows of the sculpture of Mel Kendrick, the drawings of Lennart Anderson, Carroll Dunham, Bill Jensen, and Erwin Pfrang, the lithographs of Joan Mitchell, the photographs of Gay Block, and the paintings of Pat Adams, Rita Baragona, Robert Greene, John Heliker, Shirley Jaffe, Per Kirkeby, Richard La Presti, Carl Plansky, Philip Taaffe, William Wegman, and Helen Miranda Wilson. This is a partial list, but it gives a sense of the range. These shows had their successes and their failures, but in each case it was undeniable that what the artist had in mind was art —was making visual magic. The strange (appalling, really) thing about going to the galleries was that these shows had to be experienced in the midst of an art scene that, from the evidence of the general run of stuff to be found in the galleries, doesn't know that there is or ever has been such a thing as visual magic. The good shows were more or less thriving hamlets, villages, principalities set here and there in the midst of a blighted landscape, a terrain where it was hard to believe that anything amusing or civilized or beautiful could ever grow.

For more than a decade the art scene has been devastated by warring forces. By the spring of 1992 one could be fairly sure that any segment of the scene that hadn't had the opportunity to run happily amok in the free-for-all of Reaganomics was allowing itself to be ripped to shreds by the criticism/self-criticism of political correctness. (Sometimes, criticism/self-criticism was little more than a new way of running happily amok.) Optimists might initially choose to see the new economic order as an extension of good old-fashioned private patronage and the new political order as an extension of good old-fashioned bohemian liberalism, but by the end of the Eighties even perennial optimists were despairing. The art world was at the mercy of opposing camps, camps whose only connection was their utter indifference to the passions that bring people to art in the first place. It was predictable, given the art world's overweening narcissism, that blight itself became a new aesthetic—or, considering its venerable Dadaist lineage, a new-old aesthetic. "Mssr. B's Curio Shop," a group show including more than forty artists that Saul Ostrow organized at the Thread Waxing Space at 476 Broadway, was one of the season's more elaborate exercises in the aes-

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thetics of blight (it was up in June and July). Here anything could be a work of art —rubber bands attached to the wall with pushpins, amateurish embroidery done on stretched canvas, a row of canes enclosed in brightly colored knitwork, a box stuffed with old letters—and the net effect was one of banal visual chaos. Other versions of the aesthetics of blight were more gothic in tone, inspired, I suspect, by movies about the end of urban life as we know it such as *Brazil* and *Batman*. In May the Castelli Gallery rented a space on Crosby Street so that Doug and Mike Starn could exhibit a twelve-foot globe called *Sphere of Influence* made of iron pipes and photographic transparencies mounted on Plexiglas. This rather sinister object had originally been designed for the "Metropolis" show in Berlin. On Crosby Street, where the slowly turning globe hung in an industrial space with high ceilings and spooky back-lighting, the effect was terrific instant theater. As scenery it was impressive—an urban gothic expressionist horror show; as an art experience it was nothing to speak of. If the art world were a movie, the Starns' Crosby Street space would be the secret headquarters of the Evil Empire of Antiart. But this is real life, and there is no need for secret headquarters since the forces of evil have for all intents and purposes won.

How things got to be the way they are is an interesting question; how serious artists manage to survive and even grow is the essential question. If the artists came up in the 1950s, as is the case with Pat Adams and Shirley Jaffe, we can assume there is some internal compass that was set long ago and keeps them going. (Though of course it is an achievement to keep on course at any age: consider how many middle-aged artists are happy to go haywire if that is what the times call for.) With somewhat younger artists, who were finding their own directions as the Eighties were getting underway, the ability to set a goal, not to mention keep on course, can be astounding. And there is no rule as to who manages to do it. Being decidedly anti-trendy is no assurance of anything: in the Eighties an awful lot of paltry, amateurish work was produced by sincerely anti-trendy artists. Meanwhile, there's a sculptor like Mel Kendrick, a former *ARTnews* cover boy whose show this winter at John Weber was visually provocative and a considerable development from his previous work. Kendrick's tall, wooden constructions have a jagged baroque rhythm of strutting, jutting forms that is humorous and compelling. The work isn't perfect, but it is that rare thing in contemporary sculpture—something that's felt-through in three dimensions, that we feel moved to walk around, and that we understand more and more as we see it from a number of different vantage points. There are dazzling developments, like that of the landscape painter Richard La Presti, that go on completely outside the art-world fray, but then there is also an art-world celebrity like Carroll Dunham, who, whatever his deficiencies, is doing work that has its own kind of magic. And then there's an artist like Philip Taaffe, who starts out doing work that's cynically shaped to appeal to the upscale market, and then, a few years later, seems at least to feel the compulsion to do something a little more real. What I would conclude from all this is that the sense of beauty is intuitive. Those who have it will, no matter what the circumstances, find ways to nourish it. Whether there's a limit to how much one can do with one's intuitions in a world that doesn't know or care—this is a big question which can probably only be answered by posterity. All we can do is cheer on the artists who are on course. As for the rest, to hell with 'em.

In May, Fifty-seventh Street provided an interesting lesson in what it means to create significant art without the support of a community. While Pat Adams and Shirley Jaffe had exhibitions of paintings in two of the galleries at 724 Fifth Avenue, a block away, on the corner of Madison and Fifty-seventh, the IBM Gallery was host to "Theater in Revolution: Russian Avant-Garde Stage Design," a show devoted to one of the legendary communal enterprises of the twentieth

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century. The families of forms that were at least in part invented by the Russian artists of the first decades of the century reappear in some of the work of Pat Adams and Shirley Jaffe, only time and circumstance have given them an entirely different meaning. In the "Theater in Revolution" show the circular and rectangular shapes and flat colors are the building blocks of an ideal universe, and even as different Russian artists use these elements in different ways and with different degrees of success, it's clear that they are all speaking the same language. To actually pinpoint the difference between the Russians on the one hand and Pat Adams and Shirley Jaffe on the other hand is not easy—any generalization will have many exceptions—but I would say that the difference has something to do with how an artist personalizes a form language. With the Russian avant-garde, the personal inflection is in the compositions, in the way that impersonal forms are ordered. With the more recent artists, form itself must be personalized. There is a question of trust here. The avant-gardist of the first quarter of this century could trust in a shared language; the contemporary artist cannot trust in anything that is not totally within his or her control.

The work in Pat Adams's show at the Zabriskie Gallery consisted of further investigations of a personal cosmology. The forms—circles and slender arcs and rows of dots and mysterious flickery things—add up to a fantastical astronomy. The colors—browns and coppery oranges and blacks—evoke the layerings of geological time. What was most noteworthy in this recent show, I think, were some of the largest paintings, in which Adams, who has usually chosen to fill big spaces with many small elements, concentrates her energies, so that a painting may consist of a few big, planet-like forms. These are the first of Adams's large-scale paintings, at least in recent years, that I think really justify their dimensions; here the size is related to a new sense of pictorial weight, and Adams's planetary visions take on a haunting simplicity and gravity.

Right after I saw the Adams show I saw, a couple of floors down in 724 Fifth Avenue at the Holly Solomon Gallery, the show of new abstractions by Shirley Jaffe. This is another very personal take on Constructivism. The paintings are crowded with flat, brilliantly colored forms, forms that are sometimes geometric and sometimes biomorphic and sometimes a bit of both. This artist loves to invent funny-elegant shapes. Set against fields of pure white paint, Jaffe's flattened-out squiggles and squished circles are on collision courses; they want to bang into one another. The biggest problem with the paintings is that the interactions and overlaps don't have enough pungency; when forms touch, they don't bump so much as they slump. In the strongest work here, *Blues Around the Center*, no two shapes connect, and the result is a small gathering of cheerfully determined individualists. There was also a selection of Jaffe's gouaches on paper—done with a freer brush, a bit reminiscent of the better Calder works on paper. I guess I came out of Jaffe's show feeling the way I felt about her last one—engaged but not totally convinced. She's an artist whose work I enjoy arguing with. This second show at Holly Solomon proved that Jaffe can hold up her end of the argument. It's marvelous that Jaffe, an American who's lived for years in Paris, at long last has a gallery in New York.

The Adams and Jaffe shows were the only one-person exhibitions that particularly engaged me in the latter part of the season. There were also a couple of noteworthy events among the group shows that I saw. An interesting new addition to the downtown scene was the Trenkmann Gallery, at 189 Lafayette, which specialized, at least during its first season, in theme shows that brought together a range of artists. In May this small space mounted "Painters," which joined work by a newcomer such as Carl Plansky (who'd recently had his first show at 55 Mercer) with work by an old-timer such as Joan Mitchell. Also included were Jake Berthot, David Mann, Rebecca Purdum, Milton Resnick, Mark Schwartz, Stuart

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Shedletsky, and Leslie Wayne. The work was uneven, and the presentation did not, I think, display the work to best advantage; but I admire the idea of using a broad theme (in this case painterliness) to bring together artists who are little known and artists who are well-known. I take this show as a sign that new alliances are possible.

In July the Bowery Gallery sponsored a show juried by painter Louis Finkelstein, who selected something like forty works from hundreds that were submitted in response to a national call. In terms of range and general quality this was the best of a number of artist-juried shows that have been sponsored by the Bowery and First Street galleries in recent years. There was some interesting tight realist painting as well as some interesting loose realist painting, and a few okay abstract works. What the Bowery show suggested was that there are a lot of artists out there who are connecting with significant strands of the past. How far each of these artists will go is another question entirely, but we can't even ask that question until we know that the artists exist.

I did not get a chance to see another group show, "Large Drawing," which contained work by some of the same artists who were in the Trenkmann show, but a press release that I received suggested some of the spirit behind these new group efforts. "Large Drawing" was mounted at 450 Broadway, "a private loft space, recently opened up to the curatorial efforts of other artists by an artist whose own interests lie in deconstructing the crassness of the commercial art world." "As commercial galleries close," the press release continued, "artists are looking for other ways to exhibit their work." A group show ought to be grounded in some image of an ideal community, and it's hard for us to believe in that ideal community when the reality is this blighted art world of ours. I suspect it is a measure of the disaffection and alienation of all gifted artists that the contemporary group shows, no matter how well intentioned, all end up looking tendentious, half-baked. But any sign that artists want to rebuild lost connections is all to the good. Group shows may become more and more important in the next few years. A couple of the group shows that I saw at the end of the season had their teeny sparks of magic. We need all the magic we can get.

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Books

From the baked bricks: the poem of Gilgamesh

by D. S. Carne-Ross

A great work of the imagination is *toujours en acte*, open to new readings and modified to whatever extent by them. This is true in an unusually literal sense of the *Gilgamesh Epic*. Since it was first disinterred from the ruins of the royal library of Assurbanipal at Nineveh in the 1850s and the initial decipherings began, the poem has grown steadily. The provisional rendering of portions of the narrative which George Smith read to the Society of Biblical Archaeology in 1872 and published three years later in *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*, exciting though it was at the time, is a mere skeleton of the work represented in the 1955 version by E. A. Speiser, which until recently has for many of us been the standard text.[1] Since then, with a number of gaps filled in and advances in the understanding of the language, completer versions have appeared, no less than four in the last ten years, and there may be more to come.[2] *Toujours en acte* indeed! There has been nothing like it since the recovery of Greek and Latin texts in the earlier Renaissance. The young classicist with strong philological leanings might well consider leaving the once splendid field of classical studies, now alas fallen on evil days, and moving over into Assyriology.

Proceeding step by step with the discovery of the text has come a fuller comprehension of the elements out of which the poem was built, and the stages of its composition. The story begins some time in the first half of the third millennium B.C. with a historical figure called Gilgamesh, ruler of the Sumerian city of Uruk in southern Mesopotamia. The fame of his actions passed into the folk imagination and inspired a number of heroic lays, which were not, it seems, brought together into a single poem until the center of power moved north into Babylonia. It is here that the decisive creative act took place and the great poem first assumed its form. Of this, the Old Babylonian poem, we have at present only about five hundred short lines, many incomplete, with some sizable holes in the narrative. The next and final step occurred several centuries later, probably in the last half or quarter of the second millennium B.C., and now we have a name, Sin-leqe-unninni, for the man we should perhaps call an editor but surely also a poet, whose work or something close to it eventually found its way to the palace library at Nineveh. From our perspective, we inevitably see this poem as a monu-

1 In *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, edited by James B. Pritchard (Princeton University Press, 1955).

2 John Gardner and John Maier, *Gilgamesh* (Vintage, 1985), Maureen Gallery Kovacs, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Stanford University Press, 1989), Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford World Classics, 1989), Robert Temple, *He Who Saw Everything* (Rider, 1991). A little earlier we have the sympathetic retelling in free verse by Herbert Mason, *Gilgamesh: A Verse Narrative* (Houghton Mifflin, 1971), and the prose version by N. K. Sandars, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Penguin, 1972).

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mental beginning, the first great epic of the world, but it is in fact late. So far as one can judge, the palace version has shed or lost the ruder energies of its Old Babylonian predecessor and achieved the repose of classic status.

Hitherto the layman has had in a real sense to make the *Gilgamesh Epic* up for himself, guessing at the poetry lying somewhere behind the toneless words of the scholarly cribs. By now, however, scholarship has gone far enough in its labor of elucidation to allow a closer engagement, and this means that the Assyriologist has ceded some of his absolute rights to the poet, the poet capable of finding an English voice for Sin-leqe-unninni. David Ferry, seeing his opportunity, has stepped in and given us the finest translation of the poem of Gilgamesh that we are likely to have until the time, should it ever come, when the Near Eastern classic is revealed to us as fully as the classics of Greece and Rome.[3]

To carry out his difficult task, Ferry had to avoid two opposing errors. The kind of free version that is acceptable with a familiar Western masterpiece—the radical freedoms of Pope's *Iliad*, or the relative freedoms of Fitzgerald's *Odyssey*—would be unwelcome with a poem still so distant. Nor on the other hand do we want the pedissequous fidelity that makes much of Lattimore's *Iliad* such heavy going. With no access to the original, Ferry used all the scholarly versions he could lay his hands on and kept as close to the letter as he could if he was to make a poem of it. In the introduction, the Assyriologist Professor William L. Moran writes that this "is David Ferry's poem. It is not Sin-leqe-unninni's or anyone else's, any more than *The Vanity of Human Wishes* is Juvenal's and not Johnson's. He has given us, not a translation, not at least as that term is ordinarily understood, but a transformation." Unseemly though it is for a layman to question the words of an authority in this arcane field, surely Johnson, enjoying the broad license of an imitation, goes a great deal farther than Ferry in recasting his original. For Juvenal's account of how Sejanus fell from imperial grace, Johnson substitutes the fall of Cardinal Wolsey in the reign of Henry VIII, an apt enough historical parallel but differing widely in circumstance and detail. Ferry's innovations are by comparison inconsiderable and for the most part required of him to keep the story-line going. He fills in some gaps in the narrative, rearranges it when it seems incoherent, condenses a little here, expands there, and where the ancient text repeats a series of lines over and over in the epic manner, he introduces variations of his own. His liberties are for the most part local, his interventions temperate, and all in all I think we should believe him when he says that he tried "to be as respectful of the professional scholarship as it is feasible to be."

What matters for the general reader, once he has satisfied himself that Ferry has played fair and not smuggled in a poem of his own under the guise of a translation, is, as I put it, that he has found a voice for the old poet, has given us today's words tuned to the gravity and simplicity of ancient speech:

> And may the stars, the watchmen of the night,
> watch over Gilgamesh and the companion.

(The prayer of Gilgamesh's mother as he and his friend Enkidu go out to fight the monster Huwawa.) Listen to this voice *tam nova et tam antiqua* directing us, at the start of the poem, to contemplate the great city built by Gilgamesh:

> He built Uruk. He built the keeping place
> of Anu and Ishtar. The outer wall
>
> shines in the sun like brightest copper; the
> inner
> wall is beyond the imagining of kings.
>
> Study the brickwork, study the fortification;
> climb the great ancient staircase to the
> terrace;

3 *Gilgamesh: A New Rendering in English Verse*, by David Ferry; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 99 pages, $15.

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study how it is made; from the terrace see
the planted and fallow fields, the ponds and
orchards.

This is Uruk, the city of Gilgamesh
the Wild Ox, son of Lugalbanda, son

of the Lady Wildcow Ninsun, Gilgamesh
the vanguard and the rear guard of the army,

Shadow of Darkness over the enemy field,
the Web, the Flood that rises to wash away

the walls of alien cities, Gilgamesh
the strongest one of all, the perfect, the terror.

Plain, direct syntax, sentences in general fairly short, diction at the right remove from the quotidian yet not distracting us by its strangeness. "Keeping place," for instance, is nicely distanced. It sounds familiar (older American usage has "keeping room" in the sense of living room), but the compound is unfamiliar and we must, though not at a first reading, dredge up whatever we may know about Mesopotamian religion. The city belongs to the gods, it is their place of residence; and the fact that they are in place there keeps it a safe place for mortals. The line about the ancient staircase swaggers a bit and we catch an echo of Yeats; Ferry rarely draws on other poets. Having climbed the staircase, from the terrace we look, as we are bidden, at the landscape, not in any way alien and yet not one we have ever seen, for this is the landscape of an earlier world. Gilgamesh's mother belongs to no pantheon we know of, and poses a problem, the naming of august personages, that faces the translator of Homer (what to do about "ox-eyed Hera" and the like). The Lady Wildcow Ninsun is a convincing divinity and clearly the right mother for the Wild Ox Gilgamesh. The handsome line "the Shadow of Darkness . . ." is for once of Ferry's own making and, strictly, gratuitous, though it fits in so well that one would not know this without checking the various translations.

Ferry's task was to give us the freedom of a world very far from our own, respecting its distance and yet bringing it close enough to set our imagination working and allow us to respond to the poem's central core of humanity. There is no problem—except the problem of writing with complete simplicity—when Gilgamesh, grieving for the death of his friend, says "Enkidu has died. / Must I die too? Must Gilgamesh be like that?" It is another matter when Enkidu describes his dream vision of the realm of the dead, for the Mesopotamian afterworld —not a hell where sinners are punished but the condition awaiting all mankind—is stranger than anything the Western imagination has conceived, and more terrible than Dante's carefully constructed torture house. Yet it must be made real if this death-haunted world is to work for us:

On a dark plain
I was alone. But there was one, a man,

with a lion head, and the paws of a lion too,
but the nails were talons, the talons of an
eagle.

The face was dark. He took hold of me
and seized me.
I fought with him, I hit at him, but he

kept moving about in the dark, too quick
for me,
and then with a blow he capsized me like
a raft . . .

Then I was changed into something like
a bird,
with a bird's arms, as spindly as a bird's,

and feathered like a bird. He seized an
arm
and led me to the dwelling of Irkalla,

the House of Darkness, the House of
No Return.

The difficulty of bringing remote cultural experience home to modern readers is something that many translators have had to face

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in this century, for although our age is in many ways sealed off from the past ("ghettoized in the present tense," in the words of a recent contributor to this journal), it has found itself strangely drawn to the antique. The paperbacks keep us well supplied with renderings from the ancient Chinese or Egyptian, from tribal societies, and so forth. Translators have regularly failed to find an appropriate language, and mistakenly supposed that making an old work new means making it sound contemporary. Ferry fell into no such vulgar error, nor did he try to follow the great time-traveler Pound, who was able to draw on archaic but still vital strata of our language and, at farthest reach, in his late translations from the Chinese, invented an authoritative speech of unknown provenance. ("[T]he working of Heaven hath neither sound nor smell.")

Ferry keeps to the lingua franca, using it in a way that allows it to speak of and from quite another day. The nearest parallel I can think of is Kipling's practice in *Puck of Pook's Hill.* When he is dealing with England soon after the Norman Conquest, a distant period but not severed from us by any historical break, Kipling permits himself some archaisms. (He "threddled the longship through the sea. When it rose beyond measure he brake a pot of whale's oil upon the water, which wonderfully smoothed it, and in that anointed patch he turned her head to the wind . . .") This, however, would be out of place in the stories set in Roman Britain, for here a break has occurred. To indicate this, Kipling uses not an archaic language, which would suggest a particular historical time, but a current language that has been purged of whatever belongs specifically and only to our time and hence can sound timeless. As the centurion Pertinax describes his journey up country to Hadrian's Wall, the landscape grows wilder and the language is imperceptibly heightened until, just before the Wall itself comes into sight, we are ready for this sentence: "Red-hot in summer, freezing in winter, is that big, purple heather country of broken stone." There is no word here that could not be used today, yet the order of the words and the stately cadence tell us that the world we are seeing is not one known to today's eyes.

Ferry, when he needs to elevate the tone, employs roughly comparable means. Describing Gilgamesh's approach to the formidable barrier through which he must pass on his journey in quest of immortal life, he writes:

> Gilgamesh came to the mountain called
> Mashu,
> whose great twin heads look one way and
> the other:
>
> the one looks toward the setting of the sun;
> the other toward the rising of the sun.
>
> The great twin heads brush up against
> the Heavens;
> the great udders of the mountain
> hang down into
>
> the shadows of the Cavern of the Earth.
> Twin Dragon Scorpion Beings whose look
> is death
>
> are the guardians of the entrance into
> the mountain.
> The aura of the demon guardian Beings
>
> shimmers across the surface of the mountain.
> The shimmering of the light is death
> to look at.

Note Scorpion Beings. Most translations have scorpion-men, which brings them uncomfortably close to the bogies of interplanetary fiction. These are not scorpions but Scorpion *Beings*, over-sized arachnids yet just close enough to humanity to be able to speak without sounding ridiculous. This kind of unobtrusive tact characterizes Ferry's translation throughout. The least showy of writers, he has brought this ancient poem across to today with such apparent ease that one may not recognize the magnitude of his achievement. He has added a great epic poem to world literature.

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Inevitably one is drawn to make comparisons with our own epic tradition, above all with the *Iliad*. Although it is hard to point to clear traces of influence, similar impulses are at work in both poems. Both the Near Eastern and the Greek epic face the fragility of our tenure in a world that has no special care for us and may even be hostile to our presence. Both confront the absolute fact of death head on, but they do so in different ways. There is only one death in the Gilgamesh poem, countless in the *Iliad*, yet in a sense they are always the same death, the same phenomenon, the abrupt fall of an erect, flourishing creature. In the last third of the *Iliad* the sense of pervading mortality grows heavier with the momentous, the great deaths. First that of Sarpedon, who "dies raging" at the hands of Achilles' beloved friend Patroclus, who later in the same sixteenth book is killed by Troy's champion, Hector, who will himself be killed by Achilles, the tragic event portending the fall of the whole city which will lead the poem to its close.

A work so full of suffering and death should, one might think, end in an abyss of sorrow. Instead, the *Iliad* leaves us with a sense almost of triumph, a great human triumph in the face of the worst that life can throw at us. How this is achieved will be understood when someone has explained why tragedy affects us as it does. The young Nietzsche pointed a way when he spoke of the "metaphysical solace" which all true tragedy brings, the strength that comes from the lived knowledge that "despite every phenomenal change, life is at bottom indestructibly joyful and powerful." Homer gives us the solace of this joy, above all by the unfailing, terrible joy of his language, and the lordly accent of his verse, admitting no defeat, grants the solace of this power. "Homer's princes bestride their world boldly," E. R. Dodds wrote. Seldom again have we stood so high in our own eyes.

Ancient Mesopotamia thought less well of our kind. In the other most notable poem of the culture, the *Creation Epic*, it is accepted that man was created merely to serve the gods and allow them to live at ease. Certainly the *Gilgamesh Epic* quite lacks the Homeric confidence, and the latter part of the poem strikes a darker, disconsolate note. "Death is in my chamber when I sleep," Gilgamesh says, "and death is there wherever I set foot." Enkidu dies more grievously than Patroclus, not falling bravely in battle as a hero should, but wasting away of a fatal sickness on "the bed of terror" for twelve long days and nights, watched over by Gilgamesh, a *praeparatio mortis* grimmer than anything that Achilles has to bear. Appalled at the thought that he must face a like end, he sets out on a journey in search of the Babylonian Noah, Utnapishtim, "the only one of men by means of whom / he might find out how death could be avoided."

Utnapishtim won immortality through his piety, and was allowed to survive the flood in which the rest of the race perished. (It was the powerful description of the flood that so excited earlier students of the poem because of its resemblance to the account in Genesis.) After many dangers Gilgamesh eventually reaches the patriarch, who tests his worthiness to win the privilege he seeks by requiring him to stay awake for six full days. Gilgamesh fails the test, but Utnapishtim's wife pleads that he be granted something in return for his long journey, so Utnapishtim tells him of a magical plant called How-the-Old-Man-Once-Again-Becomes-a-Young-Man. But here again Gilgamesh is unsuccessful, for having procured the plant it is stolen by a snake as he bathes in a pool. Accepting now that death cannot be evaded, Gilgamesh returns home and the poem ends, as it began, with the proud verses describing his city, Uruk. Though he himself, like all men, must die, the great city he built will endure and preserve his fame through the centuries.

In the *Iliad*, death is a familiar presence; there is no thought of escaping it. Man is the mortal one, βροτός, θνητός, death-directed from birth. In the Gilgamesh poem, death is experienced as an alien force that breaks unexpectedly into the fabric of

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human life. The shock to Gilgamesh of Enkidu's death is that it is something he never expected could happen, even though theoretically (a word hardly in place in this poem) he was already aware of mortality. "Only the gods / can live for ever. The life of man is short," he cried, holding out to Enkidu the consolation of the heroic code in order to persuade him to join in the expedition against the monster Huwawa. But this knowledge avails him nothing when faced with the actual fact of Enkidu's death and he responds to it as though this were the first death in the world. "A demon has come and taken him away," he exclaims. "You are asleep. What has taken you into your sleep? / Your face is dark. How was your face made dark?"

In this respect, we may feel that there is something naïve, almost childlike, in the poet's vision. And yet the poem, so full of the gravity of the early world, strikes us as in no way immature, and perhaps we should rather say that it reaches further back than the *Iliad*, to an earlier stage in the human story. For it knows not only of the time when death first came, but offers an explanation of how it was that death came. So at least we may understand the opening episode, the account of Enkidu's life before he met Gilgamesh. We first see him as an *homme sauvage*, a mighty being still in the state of nature:

> the hairy-bodied wild man of the grasslands,
> powerful as Ninurta the god of war,
>
> the hair of his head like the grain fields of
> the goddess,
> naked as Sumuqan the god of cattle.
>
> He feeds upon the grasslands with gazelles;
> visits the watering places with the creatures
>
> whose hearts delight, as his delights, in water.

He is unlike Ted Hughes's Wodwo, another reach into the mists of our origin, who is only dimly beginning to feel that he is no longer quite a part of the animal world. ("What shall I be called am I the first / have I an owner what shape am I what / shape am I am I huge . . .") Enkidu is already poised on the verge of human status and needs only a push to pass over. It comes when the city wants someone to curb the oppressions of Gilgamesh's youthful surquidry. Hearing of Enkidu's great strength, the citizens sent out a temple harlot called Shamhat to seduce him, and it is this, the experience of human sexuality, that brings about the change in him. (According to some accounts of Eden, it was only after the fall that Adam and Eve knew each other sexually.) His speed is no longer what it was, and the animals, with whom he had lived in amity, now run away from him. "But in the mind of the wild man / there was beginning a new understanding. [His] heart was beginning to know about itself." To confirm his new status, Shamhat, a kindly girl, gives him cooked food and beer, "the food and drink / men eat and drink." They then go off to the city, Enkidu sees Gilgamesh, they wrestle mightily, and quickly become fast friends.

Had Enkidu remained in the wild living with the beasts, we may suppose that he would have enjoyed their species immortality. In becoming human, he becomes—though he does not yet know this—mortal. In Gilgamesh we see an inverse transformation. His mother was a goddess and he himself, we are told, is "two-thirds a god. The third part is mortal." As two-thirds divine, he presumably would have been immortal; there is a line in the Old Babylonian version tentatively translated "[Your mother] raised your head above death." Bonded in heroic friendship with mortal Enkidu, he becomes mortal himself. The pair of them, one moving from part god to all man, the other from part animal to all man, together constitute a full human being and provide an account of the development of our kind. We may take this not simply as an aetiological myth, but rather as a poetic fable that throws light on the two aspects of our nature: a mind capable of transcending time and space tied

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to a vestigial animality that resists all attempts to overcome it.

The *Gilgamesh Epic*, fruit of three millennia of Mesopotamian meditation, "burdened, in its ancient way," as a classical scholar once wrote of Aeschylus, "with the mystery of all the unintelligible world," was read and admired throughout the Near East. Gradually its day passed—the latest datable cuneiform tablet belongs to the second or first century B.C.—and the poem finally sank into oblivion in the early years of the Christian era. Unknown for fifteen hundred years, it came to light again in the mid-nineteenth century, and thanks to the labors of an arduous, exacting philology, slowly began to assume its place as one of the great poems of the world. Hitherto, however, it has existed only *in posse*, waiting for a poet who could actualize it. David Ferry has performed this service, and given us a noble poem as close to the ancient original as we in our ignorance have any right to. May his achievement quickly win the recognition it deserves.

Sentimental favorites

Richard Ford, editor The Granta Book of the American Short Story. Granta/Viking, 710 pages, $27.50

reviewed by Martin Greenberg

The British magazine *Granta*, two of whose three editors are expatriate Americans, championed, in two issues in the 1980s devoted to American writers, what it called a revival of the American short story. It labeled this work of a new generation of writers "dirty realism." Dirty realism is "unadorned, unfurnished, low-rent tragedies about people who watch day-time television . . . play bingo . . . stay in cheap hotels . . . drink a lot and are often in trouble" with the law; waitresses, construction workers, etc., "drifters in a [mostly Middle American] world cluttered with junk food and the oppressive details of modern consumerism." Raymond Carver is the best known of these writers.

Now *Granta*'s book-publishing arm has put out this big anthology, edited by one of the best writers it has published, Richard Ford. In his introduction Ford calls himself a traditionalist, meaning he favors realistic work, whether dirty or otherwise. He reaches as far back as 1945 to offer a broad selection from nearly a half-century of American short stories. The selection also includes a fair number of untraditional and anti-traditional stories; there is nothing doctrinaire, embattled, about his choices. Though he has made no effort to be "fair," to include "regions or ethnic groups or writers of 'special orientation,'" these don't go unrepresented either. However, Ford confesses to feeling "grouchy" in his traditionalism—that is, to feeling harassed, beset (so I interpret him), as one kind of writer, in a literary-critical atmosphere filled with the importunate claims for this or that style or group or "orientation," or for one period's work as compared with another's. What he thinks should count, what counts for him in the end, he says, is stories, are they good? "Good stories are good absolutely," he writes, never mind what kind they are or the times they belong to. So "the stories I've included are finally simply ones I like."

The collection, chronologically arranged, starts off promisingly with a brilliant story by Jane Bowles, delicate and strong, about two whores in an unnamed Latin American country and the picnic they go on with clients; one, Julia, is ill with a lump in her stomach and is afraid that God, for her, is "more of an enemy than a friend." The humanity of whores is an old theme, yet "A Day in the Open" is fresh and vivid, suggests so much depth of life. A North African horror story by Paul Bowles follows, almost as good as his wife's in a very different way, cruel and strange; and then a solid story by Robert Penn Warren, "Blackberry Winter," a bit Faulknerish, whose speaker is a boy, in the great tradition of Mark Twain.

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With John Cheever's "O City of Broken Dreams" there is an abrupt collapse, into dreadful sentimentalizing over sweet and humble country people in the big city and clumsy satire of New York's cheap theatrical world. Cheever was a writer who had all of the equipment, yet remained stuck irremediably in softness. Still, he has done better than he does in this one. James Purdy, an example of whose outstanding work I wish I could have found in the anthology, has a wonderful story on just this subject, country simplicity in the un-simple city. "Daddy Wolf" it's called (in *Children is All*), Daddy Wolf and his Trouble Phone, and is the funny-terrible monologue of a wretched soul telephoning for some comfort into the metropolitan void.

Ford says he suffered a few disappointments in the stories he wished to include, particularly mentioning J. D. Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Banana Fish," for which he couldn't get permission. This tells us something about the anthologist's taste (though not about Ford the writer's taste). "A Perfect Day for Banana Fish" is an egregious, a champion piece of American sentimentalism. Poor Seymour Glass, done in by a crass wife. Shades of the short-lived Francis Macomber and whatever his name is in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," also done in by wives, protagonists of another champion sentimentalist (though Hemingway could be much more than that).

Sentimentalism is one of the great sins of writing (as sentimentality is of life) and takes many forms, some of them quite subtle. But always it's a failure to be truthful—whether because of weakness of understanding or fear of understanding. It is fiction in the bad, the worst sense of the word. And sentimentalism seems to me to be the curse on many a story in this collection. James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" ends in a crescendo of jazz sentimentalism. "Testimony of Pilot" by Barry Hannah is full of jazz sentimentalism, too, as well as other kinds. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s "Welcome to the Monkey House" is a comic strip of sex sentimentalism, ending piously with an awful quotation from a sonnet by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. (How is it that Vonnegut qualifies as a serious writer?)

Grace Paley, David Leavitt, Ann Beattie, T. Coraghessan Boyle, and Lorrie Moore all seem sentimentalists in the stories by which they are represented. Paley's "In Time Which Made a Monkey of Us All" is old-neighborhood sentimentalism; its jaunty voice sets one's teeth on edge. Boyle's "Greasy Lake" is a noisy effusion over adolescence in bad prose: "We went up to the lake because everyone went there, because we wanted to snuff the rich scent of possibility on the breeze . . . drink beer, smoke pot, howl at the stars, savor the incongruous full-throated roar of rock and roll against the primeval susurrus of frogs and crickets." Lorrie Moore's heroine in "You're Ugly, Too" is a college teacher, a quite amusing sharp-talker good at put-downs of complacent Midwestern students and the doltish men she dates. She is suffering from living alone in the boondocks and from a growth in her abdomen, the test results on which she is waiting to hear. Her sarcastic, unhappy voice, played against the unspoken apprehension, produces a sentimental pitifulness that falsifies the story. The lump in Jane Bowles's story is a lump of truth and illuminates the story.

"Territory," Leavitt's story about an understanding, suffering mother and her guilty yet determined homosexual son ("Guilt goes with the territory"), is pure suburban stuff, a TV-issues drama. I shouldn't ever have imagined that guilt could be so self-satisfied, complacent. Again I was reminded, by contrast, of a James Purdy story, "Cutting Edge" (in *Color of Darkness*), about a son (whose homosexuality is inexplicit yet unmistakable) and his parents; the sharp edge of painful truth in that story indeed cuts.

If sentimentalism is a distinctive feature of so many of these stories, tediousness is another. "Train" by Joy Williams, "City Boy" by Leonard Michaels, "Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time" by Peter Taylor, "Pretty

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Ice" by Mary Robison, "Here Come the Maples" by John Updike, "The Fireman's Wife" by Richard Bausch, "Bridging" by Max Apple, "Fugue in A Minor" by William Kotzwinkle, "The Babysitter" by Robert Coover—they all seem tedious to me, some in a small and quiet way, some noisily, obstreperously; one of them, Peter Taylor's, is elegantly tedious, another, Updike's, cleverly tedious. And there are better stories than these which are threatened by tedium. William Gass's "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country" has good, individual things in it, yet it's heavy, heavy. Donald Barthelme's "The Indian Uprising" *invites* boredom, challenges it so to speak on its own ground of babbling, droning disconnection, and defeats it—half defeats it—with its amusing, surprising, bewildering, teasing concatenations. The story is light, not heavy. An anti-*Wasteland Wasteland*, as it seems to me ("You gave me heroin first a year ago," a voice says in it), "The Indian Uprising" is a "heap of broken images" too, but claims—*may* claim, who can be sure?—to unite all of its fragments of twentieth-century life into a whole (a whole wasteland?): "Strings of language extend in every direction to bind the world into a rushing, ribald whole." But after this (apparent) claim near the end, the story returns to its war matter: helicopters, rockets, killed children, an ominous Clemency Committee, "savage black eyes, paint, feathers, beads." Not very ribald!

The first-rate stories in this collection, the stories that catch you with their interest and hold you with their truth, are in the minority. It would have helped if Ford had included one of his own stories, for example "Rock Springs," a dazzling piece of work, surely among the best American stories to have appeared in recent decades. To keep yourself out of your own anthology—that is being too wonderful. The rule in such matters is laid down in the Bible: You don't tie up the muzzles of the oxen when they are treading out the grain. However—. Among the first-rate there is Bernard Malamud's magical "The Magic Barrel," both an old-time tale and a modern fiction; the incomparable Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People," with its pitiless, perfect Southern comedy. There is Harold Brodkey's "The State of Grace," a careful, exact analysis of a recollected childhood which ends with the protagonist's angry outcry against himself-as-a-boy for moral-emotional failure. "In the Zoo" by Jean Stafford is a beautifully told story of orphan girls suffering the mean-minded charity of a not-so-good country (Western) person; unmarred by any sense of grievance, it ends in an uncontrollable burst of laughter at finding the hated meanness muttering away, so many years afterward, in oneself. Stanley Elkin's thumping monosyllables (in the very original "A Poetics for Bullies") compose the defiant monologue of Push the bully, the irreconcilable Satan of this boys'-life *Paradise Lost*, who "loves nobody loved." For Push, "Your no is still stronger than your yes, and distrust is where I put my faith"—or in the words of Lucifer: "Evil, be thou my good."

Of the more recent writing, I would single out Richard Yates's "Liars in Love": the liars being a writer on a Fulbright in London and a Picadilly whore. In their affair real love and shabby lying and mistrust are inextricably mixed. The story is full of intelligence, life intelligence and writer's intelligence. Tobias Wolff has a very funny, sharp story ("The Rich Brother") about a pair of brothers, one a holy fool, or trying to be, the other his feet-on-the-ground, exasperatedly faithful keeper. There is a good story by Tim O'Brien about American soldiers in Vietnam, a kind of terrible poetry of the so many "Things They Carried" in combat; interesting stories by Amy Tan ("The Joy Luck Club") and Jamaica Kincaid ("The Circling Hand") which fulfill storytelling's age-old function of telling you about where life is different and strange, in the one case Chinese American life, in the other black life on the island of Antigua. And Raymond Carver's story, "Are These Actual Miles?," is one of his best, which means, among other things, less shadowed by sentimentalism. The title of the story is taken from a line at the end, a hilarious-awful line, a marvelous line spoken

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by a car dealer, which completes the self-inflicted ignominy of a poor wretch of a bankrupt husband. Carver had a kind, a very narrow kind, of genius.

Ford's standard as editor is, Do I like the story?, and that has been my standard, too, as reviewer. And by my standard, there are too many mediocre stories and even bad ones in his anthology. I am puzzled by what I see as the discrepancy between Ford's taste as an editor and his sure taste as a storyteller. Even the prose of his introduction strikes me as falling below the standard of his fictional prose. In this anthology he goes along, though not always, with too many undeserved reputations. His judgment, outside the narrow range of stories like his own, is, I find, too often soft.

Idling into romance

Edwin Haviland Miller
Salem Is My Dwelling Place:
A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne.
University of Iowa Press,
596 pages, $35

reviewed by Guy Davenport

A biographer, having chosen a subject, must then put it back into the dense fabric of time and places where its distinction was quite different from what the biographer is drawing for us. The time in which the subject existed interacts in a new way with the time of the biography. In this twenty-second retelling of Hawthorne's shy and furtive life, his late maturity as a writer and the early loss of his narrative genius foreshadow a pattern in American writing: a brilliant period of creativity minimally fostered by a culture only marginally interested in good writing. His indifference to the abolitionist movement that so passionately concerned his neighbors—he lived across the road from Emerson, and Thoreau was his gardener—is puzzling to us, but is somehow not as surprising or disturbing as his flat refusal to be examined by a doctor, or his demand that he be buried in his clothes, without anyone's seeing his naked body. When, a month before he died, he was ill with a disease still undiagnosed, the best Sophia, his wife, could do by way of a doctor's consultation was to have Oliver Wendell Holmes take a walk with him. It is as if a scarlet letter, or emblematic birthmark, must remain forever unseen.

Equally strange was his apparent narrow interest in books and ideas. He knew the eighteenth-century writers from whom he took his gracious, infinitely variable style. He knew Salem's guilty past. Bowdoin College had given him a genteel education of sorts. He knew his Ovid. He was not, however, a reader.

Edwin Haviland Miller, Professor Emeritus of English at New York University, has edited Whitman's letters, has written a life of Melville, and is engaged on one of Frank Norris. This biography of Hawthorne was ten years being researched and written, and will remain for some time the authoritative source. It is admirably conservative and diligent, finding no closeted neuroses, no incest, no figures in the carpet.

Hawthorne's childhood was that of a gentle, introspective boy raised in a household of women. His father, a ship captain, died of yellow fever in Surinam when Nathaniel was four. His only male friend was his uncle Robert, with whom he had some measure of outdoor life and boyish fun. He was tutored by the lexicographer Joseph Emerson Worcester. His favorite author was Bunyan. Quite early he learned to live in his imagination, though he also had the rare gift of living sanely and evenly in the practical world, taking his time with a patient diffidence. At Bowdoin he was more young gentleman than scholar, making friends he would be loyal to throughout his life, notably Franklin Pierce, whose biography he would write, and Longfellow. He wrote a Gothic novel, *Fanshawe*, in which we can just make out his future genius, but was ashamed of it almost instantly. His wife did

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not know of its existence until after his death.

He took his time with everything. Among the Peabody sisters he eventually chose Sophia (though it was Elizabeth, the intellectual, who had her bonnet cocked for him), whom he married after some doubts and an erotic flurry in another direction and after a very long engagement in which he dawdled at Brook Farm, that Fourierist experiment that seems to have been the golden moment of Transcendentalism, a Victorian pastoral. The busy Margaret Fuller came and went; Emerson and Thoreau, who might have been the making of it, declined to milk cows and hoe vegetables in the name of philosophy and political justice. It provided Hawthorne with good copy, *The Blithedale Romance*.

For all his powers of imagination, Hawthorne derived his romances (his word for novel) from realities. He turned Bunyan around, finding the symbol in things, whereas Bunyan had made things of symbols. *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* are made of the Salem past; *The Marble Faun* from his culturally obligatory visit to Rome, with family, after his ambassadorial stint in Liverpool. Paul Pry he called himself, as if being a novelist were not quite a respectable occupation.

His stories, many of which are masterpieces in the art of short fiction, are never quite fantasies: they dabble in fantasy. Hawthorne is the most passive of narrators, almost as helpless as Kafka, whom Borges compared him to in a lecture in Argentina in 1949, one of the most skillful and searching comments on Hawthorne (printed as "Nathaniel Hawthorne" in *Other Inquisitions* —this is the essay in which Borges discovers that writers invent their own precursors, whether they are influenced by them or not).

Poe stares into our eyes and mesmerizes us. Melville puts his confidential arm around our shoulders. Cooper displays his subject with the wave of an arm. Balzac is like a voice from another room, which perhaps we ought not to be overhearing. Hawthorne idles into all his stories, nonchalant and guilelessly.

The story "Wakefield," which Borges found so interesting and so Kafkaesque, is blurted out in the first paragraph, breaking every rule by which Poe built a plot. Hawthorne then discusses the story, with some hope on our part that he will surprise us yet. He doesn't. He ruminates, and shows us how human a thing absurd and obstinate actions are, and how common.

Hawthorne was fascinated by the logic of absurdity, the inescapable contingencies of necessity, the "blackness," as Harry Levin calls it, on the other side of light. *The Scarlet Letter* is a symmetry of rigidities, of morals, of doctrine, of character and hypocrisy. Hawthorne, who might have insisted at every turn that these double-binding symmetries are ridiculously inconsistent with a religion teaching forgiveness and absolution, is interested instead in playing with light and shadow, as if he has no ideas of his own. It is, to quote Harry Levin again, opera. The plot is subservient to the music of the narrative.

Professor Miller is up with the times, has read contemporary criticism, but remains unseduced by it. He keeps account of Hawthorne's reception among his peers—Melville's enthusiasm and friendship, Emerson's inability to follow Hawthorne's dark probings of human meanness, treachery, and moral blackmail, his Victorian reputation as a charming story-teller who made forays into the serious novel. Unfortunately, Professor Miller stops short at what might have been a brilliant adjunct to this biography: a tracing of Hawthorne's standing up to our time.

For our Hawthorne is the product of several re-evaluations: F. O. Matthiessen's in his *American Renaissance*, Harry Levin's in *The Power of Blackness*, critical editions for college use, European criticism, his readership abroad. Henry James wrote the first astute and balanced study of Hawthorne, in 1879, in which he says that conscience is Hawthorne's ultimate subject. After Freud, we might want to add guilt and obsession.

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There was a period in which Hawthorne was a kind of harmless founding father of the American novel, associated with black-clad Puritans crossing New England snow on the way to the meeting house, with a whiff of the quaintness of witches. Leslie Stephen tried hard in a speculative essay to decide if Hawthorne were a gentleman (Americans frequently aren't), if "Wakefield" were a plagiarism, and if there were enough culture in New England to give rise to a literature not derivative of Britain. A French critic begins his essay by explaining that Salem is a suburb of Boston. And there's Q. D. Leavis's excited discovery of him (she does not make Miller's bibliography), and D. H. Lawrence's chatter.

Whitman found him dull, but liked the gossip he'd picked up that Hawthorne strolled along the Salem docks and talked with sailors. In fact, it is worth knowing that Hawthorne was a gregarious creature when he left his Concord parlor and his hermit's attic. He knew Washington, through Pierce and others, and even talked with Lincoln, noting that he did not comb his hair. He was an efficient and hard-working ambassador. To his three children (of various fates) he was a good father. His marriage was a kind of idyll.

His imagination grew darker and stranger as he tried to write the fragmentary novels at the end of his career. I have a suspicion that his influence is greater than we have yet seen. Surely we can find his narrative hand and ironic eye in Isak Dinesen's fantasies? Henry James bears his stamp, and the priest Don Ippolito in William Dean Howells's *A Foregone Conclusion* wears the trademark *Hawthorne fecit*. Borges is right to see Kafka as a continuation. He is also a kind of doubling back to Hawthorne's beginnings in German romanticism. There are Hawthornian touches and lights in Calvino; we can imagine a *Baron in the Trees* by Hawthorne; it is, after all, a kind of "Wakefield"—a moment's caprice stubbornly adhered to until it opens a window into the radical absurdity of the human will. There is Charles Ives's "Hawthorne" movement of the Concord Sonata, addressing itself to the tension between reason and superstition, order and chaos. Are there not Hawthornian tactics in Cynthia Ozick? And Eudora Welty's old Mr. Marblehall, who is he but another Wakefield?

Hawthorne was a genius who, if not perfect in all he wrote, came as close to perfection as a writer can. There are no repetitions, no botches. His demands on himself were such that some stories which we consider to be essential to his work were withheld for years, until he was sure of them. His works have remained in print, and books about him come steadily from the academic presses, to which anyone interested in him will welcome this new, admirably researched, and well-written biography.

Too "true" to be good

George Garrett Whistling in the Dark: True Stories & Other Fables. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 225 pages, $19.95

reviewed by James Bowman

If you want to know what harm the "creative writing" game is doing to American letters you have only to read this book of memoirs. George Garrett comes from a more than usually interesting family and has had a more than usually interesting life as a football player and coach, a boxer, a soldier in Germany after the war, and, subsequently, a poet, a novelist, and a teacher. His thoughts on honor should be read by everyone. But, presumably because he has spent so much of his life teaching creative writing (he is a professor of English at the University of Virginia), he can seldom write without the "creative" affectation that destroys thought and infuriates readers, however good it may make the writer feel.

It breaks the heart to see good material so treated. One of Garrett's three epigraphs is from Montaigne and serves as a cruel reminder of what this book lacks:

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> I desire that all men should see me in my simple, natural, and ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice; for it is myself that I portray.

If it is himself that Garrett portrays, there is nothing simple or natural about him. Instead he comes across as pretentious and artificial—or he would if one did not know that in this case the style is *not* the man but only the product of a lifetime's careful training in preciosity and self-consciousness, a gift which he is now handing on to his students.

Open the book at random and see what they are getting for their money:

> The Elizabethans, my forebears, with whom I have visited for many years, had themselves a proverb for almost every situation and occasion. One that I have kept in mind, as if blazoned in neon, for *this* occasion is "There can be no play without a fool in it." Am I the fool of my own play? No good or happy answer to that question, but it led me toward a skinny and postmodern one of my own. Which might as well be "You can't write anything worth reading without an epigraph." And so here is my epigraph. It has at least the advantage of being economical, since it is in my own words. Of course I am fully aware of the dangers, even in autobiography, of depending on your own words. Wasn't it Raymond Chandler who said something undeniably wise like "When you use your own stuff for inspiration, you are already dead"? Something like that.

All that and he hasn't even got to the "epigraph" yet, which is a silly poem about how much better everything, especially politics, used to be. His "proverb," meanwhile, strikes as patently false a note as his folksy intimacy with the Elizabethans and his pretended groping for the Chandler quote. Talk about being the fool in one's own play! Who can take this stuff seriously? Give it up, Shakespeare! Garrett says you've got to have an epigraph.

Balderdash! Are we supposed to like the writer better because, even though he is talking nonsense, he invites us in a playful, postmodern way to observe the mental processes which he imagines to have been at work in producing the nonsense? At least he's *sincere*. At least he's not *hiding* anything from us. True to the principles of creative writing, he makes the style take absolute precedence over the content—which, in this and not a few other cases, is virtually worthless. And where the content is promisingly meaty, we find the style and its ever-so-creative perpetrator intruding again and again on our overtaxed consciousness.

Even more off-puttingly postmodern than the style is the chic coyness about truth and fiction. The cutesy subtitle is a fair indication of Garrett's way with a quip and reminds us that the academic fashion for "texts" and "fictions" is really just another way of being snooty with the general reader: Don't expect me to do anything so vulgar as to tell you "the truth," Garrett seems to say. Clever and learned fellows like him are not as other men; they know that "the truth" is a chimera, merely some individual's encoding of an ultimately unknowable reality. "When even our prayers partake of the art and craft of fiction," says Garrett, "why should autobiography be subjected to vulgar claims of credibility?"

Let me answer that question: Because the only autobiographies worth reading (and the only prayers worth uttering, too) are those whose authors passionately believe that they are telling not just *a* truth but *the* truth. The "vulgar claims of credibility" are the means by which their readers are enabled to judge of that truth. Without them, writing may be possible but reading is not. So long as we imagine that it is possible really to know things about ourselves and others—and we general readers do still imagine that—why should we waste our time with what does not even pretend to be true?

The sad thing is that Garrett himself knows better than academic fashion has taught him. He knows, for instance, not to patronize the past. He knows that the prayer of which he writes above, the General Con-

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fession of the old Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, is richer and more meaningful than its updated equivalent for acknowledging before God that "we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep." He knows that the excision of these and other clauses from the prayer are the result of "the widespread contemporary desire to deal with God on some basis of equality." How very odd that he should then take such spiritual brutishness as an excuse to fictionalize his own autobiography!

Such a contradiction between what he knows and how he has been taught—or taught himself—to write produces a kind of self-hatred. "I am astonished to have to admit," he writes,

> that much as I love the lively arts, including the art of letters, to which so much of my life has been dedicated, I cannot accept that a life based mainly upon aesthetic principles can be anything but harmlessly silly at best and, in view of all this world's desperate needs and hungers, shameful at worst.

It is not clear whether or not he recognizes that the academic wordgaming that he engages in is "a life based mainly upon aesthetic principles," but in the dark watches of the night his conscience must whisper to him that it is.

Where that conscience, so untroubling to most of his academic peers, comes from makes a good story, insofar as Garrett is up to telling it. It seems to have to do with the Civil War and his old Southern family's sense of honor, and if you can grit your teeth and read past all the fine writing you will learn something about that. At one point he attempts to define what honor was to his uncles—something to do with manners and generosity and fierceness in battle and magnanimity in victory and faithfulness to one's word—but too seldom does he tell the story which would illustrate honor in deed. On another occasion he makes a sort of half-hearted apology for his family's sense of honor, which looks to him uncomfortably like hypocrisy. He both loves their sense of honor and refuses to allow himself to celebrate it.

Most of the material on his family, and on his early experiences at the now defunct Sewanee Military Academy in Tennessee, is good stuff, and some of it is told in a relatively straightforward manner. There are also good stories about old teaching colleagues, including a hilarious one about the poet James Dickey, who, after having been arrested for drunken driving, spent at most an hour in jail before being bailed out and was subsequently observed with a notebook labeled "The Prison Poems of James Dickey." But it is only in the last two chapters—where Garrett tells the story of his father's spending a hundred dollars to void a five-dollar traffic ticket and of his grandfather's cheerful endurance of catastrophic business failure—that the book looks like becoming what it ought to be. Even here, however, you have to cut your way through snarls of "creativity" like this:

> You know how the grandfather died ["you" here, by the way, is not us]. Died not badly. If, by that, by *badly*, you [again, not us] mean dying after a long, slow, painful, and probably inordinately expensive illness. Was more than ninety years old, still able if somewhat fragile, able to move about and to look after himself, still alert and thoughtful and blessed and cursed with clear memory, though he sometimes complained, saying that he remembered or dreamed things he would rather not have. Died quietly, dreaming or dreamless [must be one or the other!] in deep sleep in his own bed and his own house after only a few days of not feeling so very well. Feeling a little poorly, thank you.

We're all feeling a little poorly after that introduction to a story it has nothing to do with anyway. But the fact that George Garrett keeps returning to tales of these attractive ancestors holds out some hope that their example of gutsy straightforwardness may ultimately teach him to write like a man before he, too, dies not badly.

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Notebook

The death of "Punch"

by Penelope Fitzgerald

When *Punch*, a year ago, gave an elaborate-sounding party for its 150th anniversary, I didn't go, feeling that the celebrations were unfortunately out of place. This year the tough little paper has quietly given up publication. I rang up the offices to ask what was going to become of the Table round which the editorial staff had sat, for a century and a half, to decide on the week's political cartoons—the Mahogany Tree, as Thackeray called it, although it's really made of deal—and on which generations of staffers have carved their names. What would become of it? They didn't know. It was as though they had been stunned by an expected, rather than an unexpected, blow. And in fact the death of a humorous paper is a serious thing.

My father was the editor of *Punch* from 1932 to 1949. His connection with the paper started long before that. His first contribution (not accepted) was sent in four years after the death of Queen Victoria. At that time he was a poet, indeed he always remained one, but he was too diffident ever to say much about it. He admired A. E. Housman, and in particular a seemingly effortless couplet like

> I, a stranger and afraid,
> In a world I never made.

He admired G. K. Chesterton and R. L. Stevenson, and he very much admired Mark Twain. Meanwhile, he went up to London from Birmingham, in the industrial Midlands, as a young man determined to earn a living, at a time when one of a writer's highest ambitions was to get something into *Punch*. A joke was said either to be, or not to be, "good enough for *Punch*." Once in, it was repeated and admired as the paper circulated out to the limits of then British colonies. Arriving by sea several weeks later it was ready to be appreciated again. Durability was essential to a joke in those days. Of course it might well have been produced, as my father's certainly were, by an almost desperate young man in lodgings who polished his boots every morning in order to be smart enough to call on London's editors.

I would like to take a look at two of my father's remarks—or rather asides, for everything that was of real importance to him he said as an aside:

(1) "What is the difference between journalism and literature? None, except that journalism is paid, and literature is not." Here, like a true professional, he is speaking up for his trade, but he was also defending, I think, the concept of lightness—"light verse" in particular. This kind of verse, which was a speciality of *Punch*, and at which he himself excelled, is strictly a product of civilization. Often it is the last resort for subjects that have got beyond rational comment. It struck my father, as it struck a good many others, that the world was increasingly ruled by misguided people, in that they no longer seemed able to create a system which bene-

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fited even themselves. They could only be appropriately described in light verse.

(2) He once said that humorists, if it was necessary to understand them at all, could be divided into fat men and thin men, although they could on occasion take each other's parts. Thin men are, of course, dangerous, and they are resentful, indignant, clear-sighted, possibly savage. They either have less (or more to suffer) than others, or remember what it is to have less, or can identify with those who have less. Ovid, Villon's *Testaments*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Mansfield Park*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, *The Catcher in the Rye* are thin persons' books. Fat men are genial, expansive, company-loving, seem to make the sun shine simply by coming into a room, and so forth. Horace, irrespective of his personal appearance and his personal situation, was a fat man. *Barchester Towers*, *Diary of a Nobody*, *Carry On, Jeeves*, *Lake Wobegon Days* are fat men's books, providing, as thin men's books don't, consolation.

During the eighteenth century, a third kind of comic genius arrived, the fantasist. "She went into the garden to cut a cabbage-leaf, to make an apple-pie; and at the same time a great she-bear, coming up the street, pops its head into the shop. 'What, no soap?' So he died, and she very imprudently married the barber." This was part of a monologue by Samuel Foote (1720-1777), who liked to give one-man performances because they cost him almost nothing. He defied anyone else to memorize "She went into the garden." But it was not nonsense, it was free association, and so, on a grand scale, was *Tristram Shandy*. Beyond this, Sterne claimed to have a philosophical backing for his novel, that is, Locke's claim that the mind's association of ideas is based on something other than reason. As Freud put it, "it is easier to mix up things than to distinguish them, and it is particularly easy to travel over modes of reasoning unsanctified by logic."

Possibly easier, and certainly more amusing. There you have it, then. Humorists are either thin, fat, or crazy. And yet Thackeray, one of the earliest of *Punch*'s contributors, wrote that "the humorous writer professes to awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness; your scorn of untruth, pretension, imposture; your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy. To the best of his means and ability he comments on all the ordinary actions and passions of life almost." And this, also, is true.

Punch started out in 1841 in rather confused circumstances—there were several other journals with the same name—but most emphatically as a "thin" paper. It was violently radical, campaigned against capital punishment, prostitution, slums, and the brutishness of Members of Parliament, attacked the Prince Consort, named names, and joked recklessly about Jack Ketch, the hangman, and the suicides from Waterloo Bridge. The cover design was settled only after a few hits and misses. It was by Richard Doyle (who later left the paper because as a Catholic he could not stomach the violent attacks on the Pope) and showed the figure of Mr. Punch leering disreputably and somewhat the worse for drink. Toby sits beside him, sunk in the true Toby-dog's melancholy. Punch's followers are from the procession in Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* in London's National Gallery; they are supposed to have fled to his protection from the Gallery's incompetent picture-restorers. This cover appeared, with only minor modifications, every week until the 1950s, and when, largely at the insistence of bookstall managers, it was abandoned, *Punch*'s fortunes departed with it. The paper's finances were precarious—Mark Lemon, one of the original editors, had to write and sell farces to meet the weekly printing bills—and the early statement of aims was pitched pretty low—much lower, for instance, than Ross's in the first number of *The New Yorker*, which offered to "present the truth and the whole truth without fear or favor." *Punch*'s writers were all anonymous, the editor's name was never listed, and the tone was wonderfully convivial and uncompromisingly "low"—what was then called a "chop-house" or "pot-house atmosphere." But from the start *Punch* was ferociously

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political, and at the height of its influence could be seen, in celebrated cartoons, reproving Gladstone and Disraeli (shown as two tiresome schoolboys) for throwing mud at each other, or riding onto the battlefield to reproach Napoleon III. In a casual and very characteristic way, the paper, which had been expected to last only a few years, acquired power without ever meaning to.

The subjects of the cartoons were settled and continued to be settled, as far as I know, to the very end at a weekly dinner, which later became lunch, round the *Punch* table. In May 1859, after Disraeli had presented his Reform Bill to the House of Commons, "we begin discussing politics even before the venison . . . Thackeray thinks of workmen coming among gentlemen of Parliament and asking 'What have you done for *me*?'"[1] . . . Of course, the riotous staff of the early days had never given up their right to turn serious at the appropriate moment. That was always understood, even though Mark Lemon had announced the first issue as "an asylum for the thousands of orphan jokes now wandering about without so much as a shelf to rest upon." No editor ever made a decision comparable with Ross's when he allocated a whole number to John Hersey's report on Hiroshima, but in 1843 (in the Christmas number) Lemon printed Thomas Hood's *Song of the Shirt*. Hood sent it in rather diffidently, saying it could be thrown away if not wanted. But *Punch* did want it, and the ballad of the South London seamstress who got five farthings a shirt, out of which she had to find her own needles, was translated into every language in Europe. The circulation of *Punch* tripled. Hood was gratified, but was obliged to point out that he was dying. Death's door, he said, had opened so wide that he could distinctly hear its hinges creak.

Punch, at this point, had the chance of turning into the English *Simplissimus* or *Krokodil*, a risk-taking satirical weekly in the European mode. But by the 1860s it had grown less political, and, under Thackeray's influence, much less radical. On the other hand, it acquired a succession of fine black-and-white artists—John Leech, Charles Keene, George du Maurier, Linley Sambourne, Phil May,[2] who turned the mid- and late-Victorian *Punch* into a superb journal of record. As a small girl I used to sit on rainy afternoons in the corner of the dining room, where the old bound volumes of *Punch* were kept, turning the pages and entering, without needing to understand, the quite different worlds of Keene and du Maurier. Keene, the greatest genius of them all, drew London, Paris, and Scotland exactly as he saw them. As Forrest Reid puts it in his *Illustrators of the Eighteen-Sixties*, "he left nothing to chance. . . . If he wanted to draw a typewriter or an old boot he procured his original; if he wanted a turnip field for a background, out he tramped into the country till he found one. Frequently he made use of himself as a model, keeping a large mirror in his studio for the purpose—a habit not without its drawbacks, as the trousers of some of his 'swells' bear witness." It's true that you hardly ever find a pair of unwrinkled trousers in Keene. His is a world of drunks and railway porters and cabdrivers (also often drunk, and almost always abusive), of umbrellas glistening in wet streets, snug firesides, and stout wives. With du Maurier, on the other hand, you are with the Duchesses, in drawing rooms and concert halls, surrounded by the absurd musicians and artists they patronize and the yet more absurd *nouveaux riches* who are gently but decisively put in their place. "I have generally stuck to the 'classes' because Keene seems to have monopolised the 'masses,'" du Maurier said, but in any case he conducted a lifelong romance with a half-imaginary English aristocracy, improbably tall and elegant, with drooping moustaches and casual male strength corresponding to womanly beauty, dark or blonde, inherited

1 From the unpublished *Diary of the Dinners, 1857-1870*, kept by Henry Silver, who was on the staff.

2 There were also several women artists, but the "bevy of lady literary contributors" only arrived in the 1880s.

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from numerous generations. To Henry James it seemed that Keene expressed himself in terms of ugliness, and du Maurier in terms of beauty. I don't quite know what he meant by this. The lights and shades of Keene's umbrellas and bony cabhorses are surely beautiful, if the quality of the drawing is to count for anything at all.

But are the jokes funny? *Punch*, after all, can't be judged entirely by its contribution to social and political history. The usual answer, I think, would be that the jokes themselves have become a joke. There are too many words, too much explanation, and too many comments by the artist ("collapse of stout party" was one of Keene's). Here is one of du Maurier's, for March 31, 1883. The scene is a musical *soirée*, where the young ladies will shortly be asked to sing at the piano.

DANGERS OF INDISCRIMINATE PRAISE
(A CAUTION TO MOTHERS)

MRS TOMLINSON (*to extremely eligible young lady*): 'I'M SURE YOU'LL LIKE MY SON RICHARD, MY DEAR MISS GOLDMORE; NOT THAT HE'S EXACTLY *BRILLIANT*, YOU KNOW, BUT HE'S SO *STEADY* AND *GOOD*. SPENDS ALL HIS EVENINGS AT HOME, AND ALWAYS IN BED BY ELEVEN! HE'S NEVER GIVEN ME AN HOUR'S UNEASINESS IN HIS LIFE!'

'GOOD GRACIOUS!' EXCLAIMS MISS GOLDMORE, AND INSTANTLY CONCEIVES FOR RICHARD A FRANTIC AVERSION. (*Which is not lessened when she discovers that he's that modest youth in the background, pulling on his gloves.*)

This directs us to the background of the picture, where we can see the modest youth, who probably shouldn't be pulling on his gloves, since the other men don't seem to be wearing them, and we can see too that he is short and stout, crimes in the eyes of du Maurier. Du Maurier called his text, with its stage directions at the end, his "scrawl."

Some of the scrawls, of course, take much longer to get to the point. *Indiscriminate Praise* is a fair average. But the fact is that these are not jokes at all, but what the nineteenth century thought of as "good things," that is scenes or moments which, like James Joyce's epiphanies, express, when they're successful, an entire relationship or even an entire lifetime. One of the last of them, and perhaps the best loved of all, appeared in October 1906. It was by Gunning King, an artist who modeled himself on Charles Keene—a drawing of an old woman sitting by the fire. "Sometimes I sits and thinks; and then again I just sits." All the resignation of old age and natural exhaustion are in the words and the picture.

The last great Victorian editor of *Punch* was Francis Burnand, who accepted "Sometimes I sits and thinks" and (as a serial) *The Diary of a Nobody*. Burnand lived at Ramsgate, on the coast, and when he came up to the *Punch* offices at 10 Bouverie Street, the staff knew he had arrived from the loud thud as he took off his boots and threw them into the passage. As the new century advanced Burnand (who had been Sullivan's librettist before Gilbert appeared) perhaps recognized himself as out of place. In 1906 his efficient deputy editor, Owen Seaman, took over. Seaman was a good organizer, a skilled writer of verse, and a dignified man of the world who knew everyone and went everywhere. His one weakness was the (in his own view) guilty secret that his family had been "in trade"—his father had been a ladies' haberdasher. The fact that this should have weighed so heavily with Seaman (later Sir Owen) is an ominous sign of the stifling respectability which gradually overtook the paper. *Punch* after the First World War became not only conservative, but a conservative institution. What it offered its still faithful readers was not so much humor (for Seaman believed humor should be taken seriously) as whimsicality and the killing sayings of young children. This meant, however, that he welcomed the Christopher Robin poems, although he could never get on personally with A. A. Milne, considering him a dangerous radical.

Seaman was persuaded to resign with the greatest difficulty in 1932. My father then

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had to see the paper through the end of the slump and the rise of the dictators, which *Punch* most consistently opposed. The management talked him into staying on through the Second World War (he had been seriously wounded in the first one), during which the circulation reached two hundred thousand copies, the highest in its history. He had also, from a professional point of view, to face something which Seaman had regarded with horror, the challenge of the crazy man in the form of American, or, as it was usually called, *New Yorker* humor. The idea of this, fortunately, didn't at all distress my father, who, quietly correct though he seemed, had always been attracted by the point where poetry and humor meet and forget, for the moment, their responsibilities. July 21, 1937, was the significant date when *Punch* printed the "hippopotamus" joke.[3] Two hippopotamuses are basking side by side in the river; one of them says, "I keep thinking it's Tuesday." Impossible now to convey how deeply the readership was divided as to whether this was funny or could ever have been meant to be funny. And if it was funny, still it was surely not British.

To me, *Punch* means the old Fleet Street, which has itself disappeared, with the paper lorries maneuvering down narrow lanes to the printing presses, and the Law Courts and the Houses of Parliament within shouting distance. When the newspapers migrated and the art of printing was transformed I still believed that *Punch* would survive. But I was quite wrong, *Punch* is dead. At the end of the marionette play, which you can still see on the beach or at the fairground, Punch, having got the better of his wife, his baby, his dog, his doctor, and the crocodile, succumbs to the hangman and the undertaker, but—if the text is followed out to the sardonic end—comes back to life in time to collect the money. But for the once loved and feared old weekly there is no hope of resurrection. Although for several years there hadn't been much in it worth reading, I still feel very much poorer for the loss.

3 The drawing was by Paul Crum (Roger Pettiward), who was killed early in the war.

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Letters

Conducting culture at Bard

To the Editors:

I was very much taken aback by Roger Kimball's criticism of Bard College in "The Present Is History" (May 1992), his review-article on the opening of the Black Center for Curatorial Studies and Art in Contemporary Culture, one of the "satellite" institutions that operate under Bard's aegis. Regrettably, I was not able to attend the Black Center opening, but Mr. Kimball's description of intellectual life at Bard College demands a response. In particular, Mr. Kimball's characterization of Bard's president, Leon Botstein, is widely off the mark. He refers to Mr. Botstein's role as a "part amateur music conductor," labeling his conducting as a "hobby." This is an astonishing way of characterizing a man who has recently been appointed music director of the American Symphony Orchestra. He also writes that Mr. Botstein is "billing himself" as a "cultural critic." This is hardly the verb to describe the editor of *The Musical Quarterly*, one of the longest established musicological journals in this country.

He also refers to Mr. Botstein as "scornful of tradition and the past"; but historical studies and conferences flourish at Bard, as I can attest, having received the full support of the administration when, last year, I organized a conference on "The Realist Tradition in American Foreign Policy: Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Kennan," and, the year before that, a retrospective look at Walter Lippmann's role in American intellectual history.

The Bard Music Festival (under the artistic direction of Mr. Botstein and another member of the faculty, pianist Sarah Rothenberg) has received international acclaim for its unusual dedication to presenting music in its historical context; the past two years it has focused on Brahms and Mendelssohn, this year on Richard Strauss.

Under the leadership of Mr. Botstein, Bard College has also established a number of distinguished professorships. Mr. Kimball mentions only the one endowed under the name of Alger Hiss. Is it possible that he is not aware of such other appointments in recent years as those of the Bismarck historian Otto Pflanze, the British philosopher A. J. Ayer, the poet John Ashbery, the novelist Chinua Achebe, the biographer Elizabeth Frank, and others?

In short, the last term I would use to describe Leon Botstein is "a New Age administrator." Bard may not follow an antique drum, but neither does it bend to the winds of fashion and fancy. To paraphrase T. S. Eliot, "We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And to know the place for the first time." That is the task of a liberal-arts institution at the end of the twentieth century, and that, in my experience, is what Bard intends to do.

James Chace
Henry Luce Professor
in Freedom of Inquiry and Expression
Bard College
Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.

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To the Editors:

In regard to Roger Kimball's incisive piece on Leon Botstein and the Black Center at Bard (May 1992):

When people ask where I went to college, I tell them that I attended a small progressive liberal-arts college—now defunct—in the Hudson River Valley. If they press for more information, I feel obliged to admit that the place was called Bard, but I am always careful to point out that the Bard I attended for three years in the early 1960s was a very different sort of place from the academic slum that now goes by that name.

It is tempting, but in fact unfair, to attribute all of Bard's decline to President Botstein. At the same time, it has been under this man's aegis that the college has surrendered its basis for intellectual self-respect. Leon Botstein remains, for the time being, the chief obstacle to Bard's reformation.

My guess is that it's only a matter of time before your mailbox is stuffed with letters of complaint from Botstein supporters. Your attention will be called to the fact that President Botstein has conducted the Hudson Valley Philharmonic itself, as well as its Chamber Orchestra, and that he has recently been appointed to the podium of the American Symphony Orchestra.

When the business of Botstein's musicianship is raised (it is part of Bard's rhetorical smokescreen), bear in mind that his college is surely the only one in our country from which it is possible for a music major to graduate after four years (and about $90,000) without having been required to learn how to read music. I mean, like, reading all those notes is, like, elitist.

Now ask me about the Modern Russian History graduate who confessed that he could never remember whether World War II began in 1921 or 1929. Or the Philosophy of Science graduate who asserted that Carlos Castaneda and Ortega y Gasset were the most important twentieth-century thinkers in his field. Or the senior, a poet, who had never heard of Wordsworth. And on and on and on . . .

Fortune Ryan
Tivoli, N.Y.

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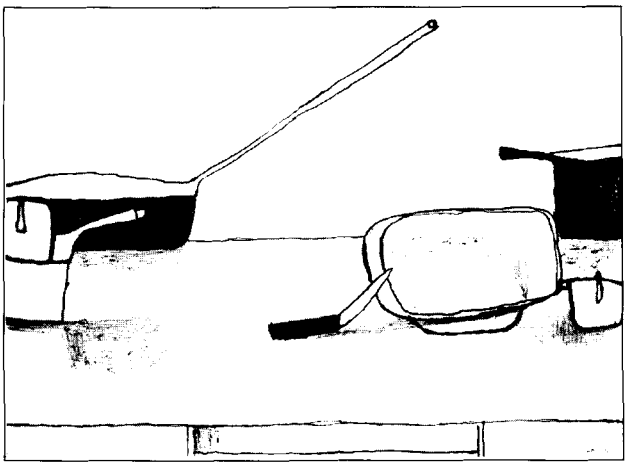

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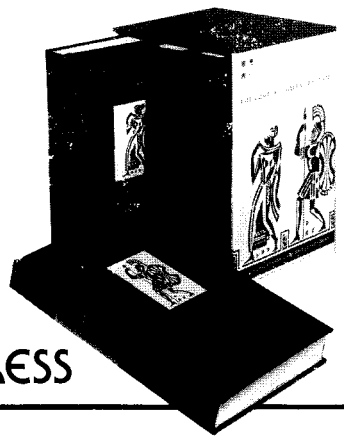

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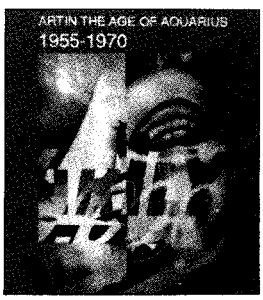

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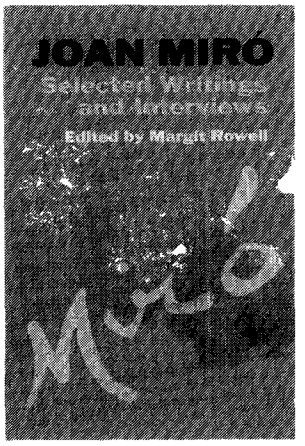

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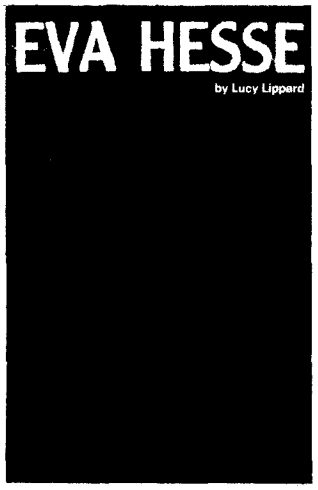

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